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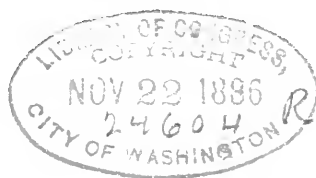
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THE
LIFE OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD
SERMONS

BY THE
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TO THE
MEMORY OF MY FATHER AND MOTHER

I DEDICATE

This Volume of Sermons.

CONTENTS.

SERMON	PAGE
I. THE UNITY OF GOD'S WORK IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH	I
II. THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST TO THE CONSCIENCE .	15
III. THE POWER OF CHRIST'S WORDS	30
IV. GOD THE POWER OF MAN'S SOCIAL LIFE . .	46
V. MAN'S POWER DEPENDENT UPON HIS KNOWL- EDGE OF GOD	61
VI. FAITH IN GOD AND IN CHRIST	76
VII. THE PLAIN LIFE WITNESSING TO CHRIST . .	90
VIII. THE SIFTING OF LIFE	105
IX. HOPEFULNESS THROUGH CHRIST	119
X. JESUS' LIMITATIONS, HIS POWER, AND GLORY .	139
XI. OUR DAILY BREAD	153
XII. GIFT AND PURCHASE	168
XIII. THE CHRISTIAN RULE OF LIFE	182
XIV. THE USE OF THE BIBLE	196
XV. THE USE OF PRAYER	211
XVI. MUSIC AND RELIGION	225
XVII. PERSONAL RELIGION AND MISSIONARY EFFORT .	238
XVIII. THE ADVENT MESSAGE	254
XIX. A CHRISTMAS SERMON	266
XX. CHRIST'S FLIGHT INTO EGYPT	279

SERMON	PAGE
XXI. THE WORK OF LENT	294
XXII. THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST	308
XXIII. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST	321
XXIV. THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST	334
XXV. THE KNOWLEDGE OF A TRIUNE GOD	347

SERMONS.



I.

THE UNITY OF GOD'S WORK IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH.

"And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." — GENESIS i. 6.

IT is not difficult to understand the conception which was in the mind of the writer of this verse. In it he ascribes to God that wonderful balance between the forces of earth and sky by which the two are kept from invading each other. The method by which God accomplishes this is the interposition of the solid expanse of heaven, by which the waters are separated from the waters, and the proper distinction of region carefully preserved. It was a most natural conception for one who, in the dawn of knowledge, looked up and saw the blue vault of heaven above his head, with the stars shining as gems in its solid expanse. Such a conception gave confidence in the security of God's

2 Unity of God's Work in Heaven and on Earth.

work ; and, provided that the idea of God as the Creator was present, the misconception could well be allowed to continue, until increased knowledge as to the methods of God's working in nature should dispel it. We know its falsity to-day, and the certainty of the absence of any such solid firmament only makes us wonder the more at the wisdom of the plan, by which the equilibrium is maintained between the earth and the sky. We know that the windows in heaven are not opened when the rain descends, and yet the gracious recurrence of wet and dry on the earth is as much as ever—nay, even more than ever—a token to us of the goodness and power of our Father who is in heaven. The oneness of the elements that compose earth and sky, the inter-action and connection between the waters above and the waters below, the unity of God's action,—those are the grounds of our admiration of creation to-day. The solid firmament dividing earth and heaven is gone, and God is more powerful and wonderful than ever in our eyes.

The change which has thus been brought about in our conception of physical nature has had its counterpart in many directions. Once the Divine right of kings kept rulers on their throne : now it is necessary for that Divine right to vindicate itself by consideration for the good of the people who are

governed, by appreciation of all the current influences in the nation's or the world's life, by uprightness of character and of intention. People and ruler are one in the elements of life, and the same laws apply to both ; there is no firmament of God's making between them, separating them into regions of laws peculiar to each. So as to the Church. We see that its Divine guidance consists not in laws or institutions given to it in the earliest days of its existence, and to be observed forever. But it changes from age to age ; it gathers to itself the best of human wisdom and experience, which, when consecrated to God, and filled with the Holy Spirit of God, is Divine assistance. It is not separated, in its nature and its powers, from the world around, for God is working in each. There is no firmament of infallibility marking off its waters from those of the rest of the world, and occasionally opening its windows to give refreshing showers. It is one with God's dispensations in all His dealings with men. Nature and the material world around us, as it becomes the subject of poetry and of art, is seen to be more than dead matter. God speaks through it, and through its beauty and its laws, to the souls of men ; and the spiritual in man finds its food on the very fields off which the farmer has gathered his crop for the support of man's body. The hard and fast line between mind

4 *Unity of God's Work in Heaven and on Earth.*

and matter, which once seemed so fixed that the latter was pronounced wholly evil, is wiped out in the discernment of the voice of God throughout the action and the ruling of each. Doctrines which once were accepted as a discipline to faith sent down out of heaven, and having no relation to the ordinary thought of man, are now found to have points of warmest sympathy with the desires and aspirations of men, and, modified in form as many of them are, yield richer fruits of good living every day. So the conviction of the oneness between heaven and earth, between God's action in the lower and in the higher part of His kingdom, has grown. To trace all the process would be to review all the growth of man in every direction. That is the work which the historian and the philosopher are always doing. Our position as religious men asks that we shall understand that the moving power of such action has been God's work in declaring the oneness between man and Himself; in making that fact known; in patient inculcation of it, even to the extent of self-sacrifice. God has been in all this increasing tendency of thought. Often as the various dividing firmaments have been threatened, men have trembled and doubted very much, just as they doubted any possibility of keeping the waters of heaven and earth distinct without the dividing firmament of the Hebrew Scriptures.

They knew not the power of God. Heaven must be separated from earth if it were still to be Heaven, and a source of refreshment and blessing ; God must not be near to man if He were still to be God and the Ruler of men. That was man's thought. And yet to let man feel and know His nearness and His kinship has been the very purpose of God, toward which His revelations were ever moving. All these other removals of the firmaments were but the side issues of that great stream of action which has been God's from the beginning. It culminated in the revelation of Jesus Christ. And if we do not understand what God has done for us in Christ in drawing us near to Himself, and in Himself drawing near to us, we shall misunderstand or misuse all the other parts of His work which are around us in life. We shall either be presumptuous, and think that our hand removed the firmament, and gained a victory over God, or we shall be mistrustful of the whole process, and seek by artificial laws and restrictions to restrain life to channels which it is ever outgrowing and striving to destroy. The true God is the one who is ever near to us, seen in the working of all our lives, close to the desires of all our hearts ; and that is the God of revelation, the God of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in whom we are called to trust.

In the first place, we can see how such knowledge enlarges the idea of God's providence. We all believe in such a thing, and feel sure that it embraces all that is good for us and for the world. God is working out His plans, and we have faith both in their character and their success. But what have they to do with us? We, too, have our plans, on a larger or a smaller scale according to our position in life. We want to be successful or comfortable, or we want to carry out some undertaking that shall give us a name, or improve our fellow-men. We see that men's actions and plans do affect God's work. A Napoleon or a Bismarck changes the map of Europe, and affects the relations of nations. A few adventurous spirits open up a continent for the extending race of man. On a smaller field the foolishness of a fanatic may cut off a valuable life, or any one of us may make or mar a life of importance. But between this action of God and us a great firmament extends: there may be lights in it, or windows may open in it now and then. But who of us dares to claim that the same thoughts and desires move God in His plans and us in ours, just as we to-day know that the same laws regulate the deep blue of heaven and the dark mould of this earth? It is just that confidence which is conferred upon men's lives and their work in Jesus Christ. We are not mere tools in the hand of a great

Artificer ; there is not a merely mechanical coincidence between His works and ours, that makes a man's activity minister to God's glory. There is a motive of life given to us, the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, which is at once His and ours. We labor to place our plans at Jesus' feet, to make them serve His purposes in the world, and then we are doing what God is doing also. We cannot see the end of that great line, at one extremity of which we are laboring ; we cannot pretend to know all that God intends to accomplish by the work of Christ : but we can see somewhat of that which He intends to do for us and for the world, and at that we can labor with Him with new courage and confidence and hope. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," if we understand what we pray, we are putting into all our work the very spirit and motive by which God works. So one firmament of separation between God and us is removed by Jesus Christ. And as we reflect how much task-work and routine action is a necessary part of every man's life, scarcely any gift could seem more valuable for us. We do not have to wait for inspiration and strength until the exceptional moments come, when, as it were, out of an opening in the heaven light comes down upon us, in the memory and strength of which we live through the intervening darkness until the next visitation ;

8 *Unity of God's Work in Heaven and on Earth.*

but the same atmosphere of light which makes the heavens what they are is with us always. As St. John tells us, we are to walk in the light, as He is in the light. The lesser purposes of this present life differ not in kind, but only in degree, from those of some future life, when the knowledge of Christ and of His kingdom consecrates them. Nay, so great is the revelation of Christ, that, as the sons of God, we are even able to say that He and we are walking toward one great purpose, and are animated by one spirit. Let no man say, "It is my daily business, it is my engrossing care, that keeps me from knowing God." That very life of care, consecrated to the service of Christ, is the means of getting near to God.

We pass from the thought of action to that of conduct. We all of us strive, with a certain amount of earnestness, to observe the laws of right, and to help the cause of good morals. We recognize their value to the world. Steadily, and by patient continuance from generation to generation, the necessity of sobriety, honesty, and purity in life has come to be recognized. The laws of life around us enforce this; examples and warnings on every side press their lessons home upon us. There may be exceptions in the world, where the workings of other causes are to be discerned; but we do confidently assert that character is, after all

is said, the truest key to success. This is the law of the world about us. But is it any thing more? Are these mere provincial arrangements of the world on this side of the firmament? And do we know any thing about the essential laws of action? If not, we can hardly wonder that the boldest and most adventurous spirits are often unwilling to be bound by what are mere prudential arrangements, and that they let the desires within them have full rein, and overleap these petty barriers. There can be no real love for righteousness until we see it as the law of the world, the very law of God's own nature, which shall last forever, and to which the greatest spirit may be proud to submit. Here, then, is a firmament, a separating barrier, between the action in heaven and the action on earth which Christ came to obliterate. When He came from heaven, the Son of God chose not the greatest or the most brilliant or the most successful life, but the best life. What the ordinary course of life here approves, the voluntary choice of God also approves. Heaven and earth, God and man, live by one law. The heart of man declares that that life which Jesus lived was the best and the most beautiful that the race of men here ever saw. We are no longer left in doubt as to what the eternal law of moral action is throughout all the universe of moral beings. At once the realm of character

becomes infinitely exalted. It is a more dreadful and serious thing to transgress a law so fundamental as that, than it is to cross some petty enactment that belongs to this mortal life only. It is a much greater thing to be good than it is to be any thing else. The other attainments of life shall pass; Christ could afford to despise them all: but character, that was something which the Son of God was glad to claim as the result of His earthly life, and is something which in every life shall live forever. In all our efforts in that direction we have before us life eternal. God may, and very probably has, worlds and spheres of being where possessions such as are akin to the substance of this material world, will be utterly useless or even unknown; but now we know that in all the realms of being, throughout the stretches of the universe, wherever God reigns, there is not a place where character is not of value, where righteousness is not the law of life. Now that the dividing firmament which shut away earth from heaven is gone, there is meaning of transcendent significance to those words, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

The language is not merely figurative. We know what the heavenly treasures are: they are those same treasures of righteousness which are so valuable on earth. And if, by our birth, our training, our education, our circumstances, God has given us upright character, we must not let it remain a mere earthly attainment, making life more regular and comfortable, and conscience more easy. We must see the loftier side of uprightness. We must lay that possession of character at Christ's feet. We must ask Him to lead us to the knowledge of God, our Father and His. We must look upon this gift as one belonging to us as immortal souls, and not merely as men who value the respect of our fellow-men. We must take Jesus not merely as an example, but as a leader, who opens to us the way of eternal life, and who tells us the value of that jewel, character, which we possess, as the weak, short-sighted knowledge of earthly men can never do.

I can deal more hastily with one or two farther examples of the way in which Christ has opened heaven to us. There is in all of us the need for sympathy and comfort; in our happiness we demand the one, in our sorrow we ask the other. Our brethren in the world give what they can at times, but we want to know that it is not a mere earthly arrangement by which we thus crave com-

panionship and love. At times the world of nature seems to speak in sympathy with our feelings ; and then again it is sadly contradictory, and we seem shut up to the narrower range of human knowledge. But when Christ announces the love of God, when He proves it, and manifests it by His sacrifice of Himself for us, then the old idea of a harsh, cruel, and unsympathizing God has disappeared. That love is unfathomable, as the blue of the firmament over our heads ; but it is an expanse, not a solid barrier, shutting away the waters below from the waters above. We learn that wherever the vilest sinner goes, there God's love goes, and endeavors to bring him back. Whether our need of comfort comes from sin or from suffering, whether the cry for sympathy comes from despair or from grief, God's love is a reality which rules alike in heaven and on earth. Since it found the way to manifest itself once, we are sure that it can manifest itself again. If it could take flesh and suffer for us, it surely can take to itself the wings of the Spirit, and visit our hearts with that message of salvation which we all need. How well we understand, in these days, that if that picture of a solid firmament had been the true one, the earth would have been shut away from its truest sources of strength and of refreshment ! It needed not to be shut up to itself, but to be part of God's great universe, for

safety and for health. So shut up to himself, away from his God, man must perish. He needs the free access of God's love to lead him upward, just as he needs the possession of the love of his fellow-man to protect and to keep him here. It is the same love, and it is as surely an element of life between God and us, as it is between us and our brother.

And as to our difficulties, how many of them arise from our looking upon ourselves as connected with this earth alone, shut away from our God by some impassable barrier! "If a man die, shall he live again?" How can I ever answer that until I know that I have a share in the eternal life of God! that He cares for my life enough to give Himself for it? Then, in contrast with men's guesses are Christ's words, "Because I live, ye shall live also;" "I am the resurrection and the life;" "Who-soever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." When the conditions of life are drawn, not from this earth only, but from heaven likewise, I cannot fasten to this bodily existence the life of the soul. It is so with all the other questions of the soul, to which there is no answer as long as that soul is confined to this earth, and shut out from the knowledge of that heaven to which it belongs. Christ brings that knowledge, and dark questions receive from Him a light which none other can give.

When in the Book of the Revelation we read,

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth : for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away," can we not feel that we are hearing, not only of that last end of this earthly universe, but of that continual process by which the old heavens and the old earth, under the influence of Christ and of His Gospel, are giving way before a conception of life now in the presence of God, to be completed hereafter? Are we living such a life now, or are we holding to the old narrow conception of an earthly existence, without any knowledge of our God? The very ideas of modern science and thought, which have done away with distinctions once thought to be fixed and impassable, tell us of the influence of our Master's work. But we stand at the very centre of that movement. Our science must not surpass our religion in reasonableness and strength and breadth. It cannot do so if we appreciate the true meaning of the presence of Jesus Christ. In the knowledge of a Divine Saviour moving and inspiring us in our earthly work, we are to feel heaven and earth coming together. As they were one in Him, they are to be one in us. Take life with all its duties; drink of the waters that are opened for us here, but drink of them only as a part of that Water of Life which, given to us from heaven, tells us that men have no right and no strength in any other refreshment than that which comes from the presence of God.

II.

THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST TO THE CONSCIENCE.

"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."—1 JOHN iii. 20, 21.

THIS feeling of our heart, which St. John mentions here, is evidently what we call the voice of conscience. There is something very significant in the easy and natural way in which it is referred to here. It is taken for granted as a power which exists in man, and to which attention must therefore be given; to cultivate it rightly, to be able to understand and to use it, is evidently considered to be an object at which all religion aims. We all grant the existence of a conscience: we have felt it too often within us, not to know what is meant by its name. It breaks forth in characters where it seems as if it would have long ago been too much discouraged ever to enter its protest again. We reserve, as the last most condemnatory description of a man, the statement that he seems to have no conscience. Conscience involves not

- only a power of recognizing what is good or evil, but it also comprises that strange, uneasy feeling,
- which we cannot shake off, which comes over us when we are more or less conscious that we have violated the laws relating to good and evil. It is the witness which man carries within him that he is a moral being, bound to do not only what is pleasant, what is convenient, what is useful or profitable, but what is right. No matter where that idea of what is right came from, when in the heart of man it is recognized as right, it is because of the power of the conscience. It is a mysterious but valuable possession. We cannot locate it any more than we can locate the possession of life. It is a mode of thought that makes man's mind differ from the mind of all other creatures ; and we dread the loss of it, because by that the man's moral power seems hopelessly maimed, and his moral position lost. We cannot appeal to him or deal with him as a man. And yet this important and elevated power receives strangely little culture and encouragement from our action and thought. The other parts of life are disciplined and trained, the objects that they desire are put before them, the reasons and modes of their working are studied and comprehended, their culture and growth are watched with anxiety, the dangers to which they are exposed are carefully avoided. Conscience asks for

duty and the elevation of duty, and we hardly know what to give it. Most significant, then, is the way in which St. John, when he is dwelling on the love and service of God, turns and lays that before the conscience. He does it as naturally as we give food to the body, and wisdom to the mind. That power which the common course of life has to let drift uncared for and neglected, he turns to at once as the very one for which he has a word. He shows that there is hope for our most important faculty if we will only let religion have its true power in our lives. He does not argue that there ought to be such a thing as conscience: he supposes all men to admit that. He does not wait to prove that religion speaks to the conscience; but he goes right on to show what it says to it, and how it helps it. The religion which is full of the love of God needs a conscience to which it can speak. That is its field of action. Without it, it can do nothing. It says to men, "Give me just what you find it hardest to dispose of otherwise, and I will be satisfied." Try to make religion play its part merely on our bodies or our minds, and it becomes a thing of ceremonies or of doctrines. Try to make it play its part on our feelings merely, and it becomes a thing of sentiment. The religious man must be one whose conscience is ever active with the strong sense of

duty that has been given it, and is ever clear as to the source of duty with the sight of God that has been revealed to it. There is a field in religion for every faculty of man to exercise itself fully; but it starts with the man just where every other source of power has nothing to give,—with the conscience. It makes the moral sense a reality as it dwells with vigor on those two great ideas of man's sin and his power of belonging to God. Those are the two things which the conscience whispers blindly: "You are not good, and you ought to be better." Those are the two things which religion says in still clearer, more definite, and more practical tones: "You are a sinner, and you ought to be God's child." The poor, stifled voice of conscience hears this hopeful response to words which it has been trying to make heard amid sounds which drowned them. It feels that it is no longer alone; it looks up, and is saved. How much better our lives would be if this close relation between the conscience and religion were ever clear! Religious men would day after day get better and deeper knowledge of their duty. Conscientious men would find that this guide that they were blindly reverencing and yet despairingly following was not a poor, lonely stranger from a better land, but was the very voice of God leading them naturally and easily on to their heavenly Father.

But so great a power as conscience is not to be dealt with lightly or easily. St. John not only recognizes and encourages conscience, but he tells us how we are to deal with it. Sometimes our conscience accuses us, and tells us that we have done wrong. We all know that feeling, and it is one in which we can never delight. The wrongdoing of which we are conscious separates us from our best ideas of life; we are ashamed of ourselves. It separates us from others who may know, or who, we think, may know, our secret. The accusation of others is not nearly as hard to bear as the accusation from within, for the latter we cannot deny: we ourselves are the witnesses to its truth. We cannot palliate it: it is brought home to us in all its force. It is within us, where thought is most active, where feeling is most sensitive. Such moments of a guilty conscience must, then, be among the deepest and most important of our lives. We dread them so much that we try to forget them in the past and to avoid them in the future. How do we deal with them when they are present? How often this stirring of conscience leads only to an attempt to quiet it! The feeling is so unbearable that we strive at once to apply the remedy at just the point where the pain is felt. We flee to some act of reparation, some word of apology, some deed of penance,

which shall quiet the conscience, and ease our pain. The very intenseness of our feelings leads to a superficial cure; our own feelings are uppermost in the intensity of our self-accusation, and we think of our own immediate position alone as we strive to free ourselves from the weight of a condemning conscience. There seems to be no time for largeness of thought or breadth of action. The one thought is, Get rid of this burden. Perhaps we rush from one fault to another. Some neglect of a suffering brother makes us thoughtlessly lavish in acts of benevolence; some undue assertion of power makes us lax in standing up for what we know to be right; some carelessness in belief makes us blindly superstitious. I have heard a man of prominence, whose character, training, and position made him inclined to underrate the importance of all purely moral considerations, declare that he had found conscientious men the most unsatisfactory to deal with, and the least to be relied upon. To his mind, looking without sympathy, as a critical spectator, they were always one-sided. They were so careful about some one point, with regard to which they felt a special fear, that they neglected many others where evil could easily be done. Surely we can all appreciate in ourselves the power of such a criticism, as we remember how often some sad failure, of which con-

science has accused us, has led to the putting of a patch on our moral garment in that one particular place, until at length the process, oft repeated, has led to our appearance among men, clothed, indeed, — covered over with marks of moral carefulness, — but unattractive, and ashamed of the very results of God's training of us as men with consciences. Now turn to St. John's mode of dealing with an accusing conscience, and see how true a remedy it contains for these dangers. "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." That is to be the thought of a man filled with the love of God. Instead of pointing out one little fault, the accusation of conscience is to open a sight into all the possibility of sin; instead of shutting us up to the thought of ourselves, it is to lead us up to the thought of God. There is surely no tampering with conscience there, no silencing of its voice. We are made to see more than ever the heinousness of sin; but it is seen in the light of God's searching judgments, not of our excited feelings. We see the one thing that has touched our conscience as a part of the great sin of all life, departure from God; and to Him we betake ourselves more closely than ever before. We learn to be watchful at every point; we put all our character and all our action into God's keeping. Our new resolutions and efforts take in not only the

correction of that one failure, but the remedy of all those failings, known only to God, of which our conscientious self-reproaches are but indications. We rise broader and better men from our discomfiture, for it has told us of God. Our conscientious troubles have not been the opening of a door which lets in an uncomfortable draft upon us, and which we close again as soon as possible ; but it has been the opening of a door into the larger, freer air of God's love and discipline. The first breath has struck us uncomfortably, accustomed as we were to our more confined and corrupt atmosphere ; but we arise and go out through this door, and are made better and stronger men in all our action. When we come in contact with moral questions, when our conscience, which is our possession as moral beings, is stirred, we are dealing with things in which we demand the thought and help of God. The world did not cause the questions, and cannot solve them ; we of ourselves cannot do the work, for the questions speak of us in our relation to Him. But we must know God in order to deal rightly with our stirred consciences, — know Him in His love, in His true position as our Father, as He has showed Himself to us in Christ, calling us, forgiving us, providing the way for our salvation. Then we can rise, and be bold to put down the disturbing visitor in our heart. With a wisdom

large and comprehensive, because it is the wisdom of God, we can remedy our failing, make reparation for our sin, cleanse our conscience, rise to a better life. Our knowledge of our sin will be lost in God's deeper knowledge of it, as He, "greater than our heart," knoweth all things; and we shall find comfort and strength in adding, as Peter did after his sin of denial, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love thee."

So St. John shows the love of God as dealing with a troubled conscience. Now turn to the conscience in the other state, when it is not troubled, the quiet, easy conscience. There are such times in life, times when no sins seem to come within the limits of our consciousness to harass our minds. We do not doubt that we are sinners, but the course of life does not at such moments bring our sins vividly home to us. We are apt to distrust such times, and either to try to stir our conscience by dwelling on our sins, or to reproach ourselves that we are not doing better with our lives, and using them to more purpose. The first develops a disagreeable and morbid self-consciousness; the latter distrusts all God's dealing with us, and makes us inclined to think that He is only fitfully with us. Surely there must be moments of quiet and rest needed for our moral life, just as the growing and strengthening child needs the hours of sleep for his

development. And so we rejoice to hear St. John's supposed case: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not." It tells us to be confident in God at all times. It tells us to have deeper signs of moral health than morbidness of feeling or fussiness of character. It tells us that there is no more need of always stirring up our consciences in order to convince ourselves that we are Christians, than there is for a mother to wake up her peacefully sleeping child in order to assure herself that he is well. And yet we know the dangers of a quiet conscience too well not to look deeply, and see St. John's provision against them. It is so easy to be satisfied, to feel that moments of quiet are certificates of exemption from all moral exertion, to enjoy our ease, and be careless, that we rightly dread the after-effect of such times in our life. They seem to result in a retrograding in all our moral culture, as conceit and sloth take possession of our contented souls. We come out of them with all our watchfulness relaxed, and with all our strength gone. We are often wakened from them by finding ourselves in some terrible sin. And the reason surely is, that to us such moments seem the end, and not the beginning, of moral paths. To us they recommend themselves because of their own pleasure; they are to be enjoyed for their own sake. But to St. John they are attractive as opening another

and a delightful mode of approach to God, who Himself is the only end of moral attainment. "Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." It is a time when we can approach God in that spirit of loving confidence in which we can learn most of Him. We are untroubled at such moments, and our minds are free to dwell on Him, on His power and His love. We approach our great Father in the way in which the child who has been faithful and good draws near to his parent, — ready to take his hand and enter his confidence ; not arrogating equality, but simply entering into that relation which the father loves to have him assume. God, in the view of St. John's Gospel, is not a God to be sought only in time of sin or of trouble. He is one who is able to give more than forgiveness in sin, or succor in trouble. He is one able to give something better than either of those, — sympathy and ready love ; able to make us grow up, by the sweetest natural processes of life, into men after the likeness of our heavenly Father. He works in sunshine as well as in storm, in development as well as in creation, in peace as well as in war, in the still, small voice more than in the whirlwind. If we have a faith in such a God, if we see Him as John did in Jesus Christ, then most gladly we shall welcome every moment of quiet as a time that tells us, not of ourselves, but of Him ;

not of our goodness, but of His kindness ; not of our rest, but of His activity. This quiet, if it is a worthy one, came not from ourselves. The circumstances of life that have shielded us from storms of sin, the knowledge of a Gospel which has been the forming power of our life, the presence of a Spirit that has breathed peace to our souls,—all these have been His gift. With greater confidence we approach Him. Now through that open door of conscience comes the warm sunshine, not making us drowsy, careless, and slothful, but inviting us to go out into the presence of our God, from whom it comes, and to enjoy it and use it, to make us stronger men. We store up strength in such moments. We ask and receive with deeper faith, because through all our petitions runs that tone of confidence and of nearness to our God. The resting conscience is to be alive, not dead ; gaining strength like a resting man, sure that the time of action, hard and strenuous, is yet to come, when all will be needed in the emergencies of action. It will wake soon enough ; we need not stir it artificially, or begrudge it its quiet, if we only see that quiet as the gift which makes us confident in God. There is no intermission to its action ; but always, if used in the faith of Christ, it is pointing to its true object, God.

Conscience is a great blessing. It is not a dis-

tress, to be disposed of as soon as possible. It is not the pain of a diseased moral nature. It is our noblest faculty; it belongs to us most naturally. Is there any thing worse in this world than mistaking a friend for an enemy? We lose what is our greatest strength, we gain what is our greatest curse. We have the battle with the supposed enemy; and we are without the very means of conducting it, for he who should be our friend and helper is not by our side. It is because of this that suspicion poisons many a life, and makes it a failure from beginning to end. Every thing in that life is weak by a continual mistake. And when the same mistake takes possession of us, as we look at ourselves and our moral equipment for life's work, will it not be still more fatal? How we fight against our conscience, dread its frowns and distrust its smiles, and act as if it were a faculty meant to harass us, and often determined to deceive us! It cannot be. If such had been the case, it would have killed man long ago with its persecutions and delusions, or man would have deservedly killed it, and put it out of his nature, for its constant and unnatural harassings. But conscience is as strong as it ever was, still conducts itself as imperiously, and sometimes contradictorily; and each man still fights with his conscience the battle that has been humanity's from the beginning. Are we

not making a mistake, and taking that for our enemy which is our friend? And is not that mistake part of the still greater one which makes us think that God is the enemy, the hard taskmaster, of us all? Never will conscience be what it should be to us until He who gave it stands out before us in His true light. So Jesus is the only leader and guide to the conscience; He alone makes it what it should be to us, and harmonizes all its words and actions. Other things provoke it: all life stirs its words of right and wrong; you hear them every day. But that never can make us really conscientious men. Only He who tells us of the nearness and love of God, holds Him up to us as a loving, forgiving, disciplining, and perfecting Father,—only He can tell us how to use rightly this greatest of gifts, the conscience. In Him all its words shall be harmonized; it shall be our sweetest companion by night and day, in winter and summer, in work and in play. We shall never want to lose it, as we listen eagerly for its slightest word; and men shall learn not only to respect it, but to love it as they see it in our action. Poor, maltreated friend! it shall begin to be appreciated by us, as it does its true work of leading us at all times nearer to the God whom Christ has taught us to love. His Spirit shall inspire its wisdom; His redemption shall take the sting from its rebukes; His love shall

make profitable and pleasant its soothing words. The growth of the conscientious and the Christian life must ever keep pace, for they are one and the same. To be a Christian is to be a truly conscientious man. The conscience within us, which none of us ought ever to desire to silence, calls out for the Saviour Christ ; and we must not deny it, for it can live only by the love of God.

III.

THE POWER OF CHRIST'S WORDS.

"The officers answered, Never man spake like this man."—JOHN vii. 46.

WE are not allowed in the Bible to think that the reception of Christ by those to whom He presented Himself was always quick or decisive. Processes of thought and of conviction are displayed, and objections are answered according to their nature. Disciples are seen gradually maturing in their degree of certainty, and every variety of motive and reasoning contributes toward the result. St. John, who of the apostles seems to have been most conversant with the current thought of the time, shows us on more than one occasion the general fermentation of thought which Christ's appearance and position caused in that Jewish community, and specifies different considerations which influenced the decision of the various groups of men which came in contact with Him. As our minds are alive to these various instances, constantly appearing in the condensed statements of the Gospels, they give to the teachings of those Gospels

an intensely human aspect. We see, that, though the truth is Divine, it will not reject the ordinary channels of approach to the human mind; it will utilize them all according to their existence and condition in the various classes of men. All men—and, since men differ according to the times in which they live, all ages—will not be approached in the same way; and yet, as all men are approachable on some side of desire or reason, this swiftly moving religion, which is depicted as appealing to so many men, and as strong in so many ways, will have an appropriate means of approach to all, so that none may escape its blessings if they really wish them. That path of approach is to be discovered, not by unnatural departures from ordinary life, but by the right use of all the tendencies which give to each man and to each generation its peculiar character. Christ, as the Gospels represent Him, is at the centre of human life. It is useless, it is vain, to leave any point of human life and to go to another in hopes of getting nearer to Him; for straight from Him to every point there is a direct line, down which the ready soul may look, up which the ready saving power will move.

One of these paths of approach is stated in our text; and it is such a human one, and has so much affinity for men of our times, that we can

with profit learn more of it. Certain officers, sent from the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest Christ, heard the words of Christ, and were so impressed by them that they returned without accomplishing their purpose. Those words disarmed their opposition, and apparently opened the way for a better feeling in their hearts toward Christ, which may or may not have been followed out by those men to a result of perfect belief. It was a method of conviction which agrees very largely with all that we know of God's ordinary modes of working among men. No voice from heaven startled those officers with words of attestation, no miracles appealed to their sense of wonder or desire for benefit, no blinding vision made them feel their own insignificance and worthlessness. It was a much simpler and nobler method than either of these which was used: as men listening to a fellow-man, they found the spell growing stronger and stronger; words such as they had never heard before, gradually brought the conviction of a power above that of all other men, until at last the thought of opposition to such a character seemed irreverence, and the conception of their ability to injure or even to fetter such a man seemed folly.

If the words of Jesus had such an effect at that time over men full of hostility, and armed with power

to exert it, we may well believe that they are equally powerful to-day. Where what appear like more supernatural forces cannot enter, this mode of appeal can have an effectiveness, which we need never distrust. For the power of living thoughts and words is greater in the world to-day than ever before. The changes of circumstances, through which the world has passed so rapidly since Christ came, have made the material surroundings and actions of past ages almost unimaginable to us. And yet from those ages, both in religious and in secular history, the words of great men live among us with all the power of their original utterance. The man who spoke them is a reality, even though the times in which He lived have long ago disappeared. There is a supernatural power to words that is strangely pervasive; they pass from age to age and from country to country. They know no limits of climate or of race; the human heart recognizes their power, no matter where it beats, or how it is clothed. The religion of Christ, intended for all times, received its most potent earthly instrument in the spoken words of its Founder; by those it was sure of perpetuity and of diffusion. Going into times when miracles had ceased, and visions were treated as the vagaries of a disordered brain, they would carry that which all men would appreciate; they would be

the gate of approach to a deeper study, a fuller comprehension, and a maturer faith in the great Master. The embodiment of His power in His words was a prophetic look by Christ into the times to come. Institutions would change; temples would decay; the very face of nature would not remain the same. The living thing from those days, sent forward into the times of universal literature which were to come, was to be the words of Christ. They would not be bound to the soil, accessible to a few travellers alone; they would not be wrapped up in antiquities, known only to scholars. They would be carried into connection with individual lives; they could be treasured in the homes and the hearts of every man and of every class. Still more, to exalt the function of words was to give value and currency to a universal coin in which every man's purse abounded; it was to make the possibility of following in the line of the Master's work the possession of every man to whom breath had been given. It stamped Christianity as the gospel of humanity, calling out the power, and intensifying the responsibility, of every human soul.

All these aspects of that method of conviction, which God employed with those officers of the Pharisees, have great significance to-day. Despite the material researches and speculations of these

times, they are times in which spiritual force, as it passes from age to age and from country to country, is more evident than ever before. The progress of learning and the growth of mutual intercourse have given the spiritual power in man an audience which knows no limits of time or place. Amid all these voices which come to us from every side, the words of Jesus of Nazareth are more prominent than ever. The expression of a band of Jewish officers, with their probably slight acquaintance with literature or orators, was merely a strong statement: "Never man spake like this man." To-day it has a literal meaning. No words have touched so many hearts; none have appeared so wonderful in their simplicity and their depth; none have been found to be so free from petty prejudice, and so tender of every feeling of the human heart; none have stood, as they have, the ever-renewed comparison with each successive generation of writers; none have been able to endure so calmly amidst all misinterpretations alike of enemies and of friends; none have revealed such new resources of meaning, as new emergencies have driven men to them for help. These are facts which each new race of critics makes stronger; they are facts which, in their historical reality, appeal to men living in a world of realities, which, in their spiritual signifi-

cance, speak to the richest sensibilities of the human soul. The words of Christ are a test of earnestness. Does a man want the best in life, the most thoroughly tested sources of wisdom, the words which all, from different points of view, unite in praising, then he must make himself acquainted with the words of Jesus; he must study them more thoroughly than any others; he must never let them go until he has an understanding of their wonderful power. No sneers at a book religion, no indignation at the inferences which others have drawn from those words, absolve from that duty. In the midst of the greatest confusion of mind or difficulties of soul, here is an ultimate duty on which a man can rest, one which comes to him indorsed by all the best analogies of life and authority of experience. When the history seems traditional, and the doctrine enigmatical, still the clearness of that light from Christ's own words stands forth. If the field is narrowed, what remains becomes all the more wonderful and imperative. Lives which have been severed in other sympathies, can meet there, and, under the leadership of the one Master, strive to find the way together into the perfect light. To-day more than ever the words of Christ ought to be in the hands and the minds and the hearts of all men.

The power of Christ's words lies in their morality

and their authority. To those messengers of the Pharisees who had been brought up under the law, the idea of a living authority was perhaps the more striking feature of Christ's teaching, as we are told that the people wondered at Him, "for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." But Christ's statement of the laws of conduct, and His inculcation of righteousness, were also very different from any thing to which they had been accustomed. He never repeated one of the old, familiar commandments without going back to its very foundation, and showing that its form was nothing, and that its spirit was every thing. He laid down no new commandments, entered into no detail of action, prescribed no new ordinances. Men were to be righteous with a perfection of which scribes and Pharisees had never dreamed, but it was to be the perfection of their Father in heaven. His enemies were puzzled ; something was new in these words, and yet not a word of disrespect was spoken of the old law. They could find nothing of which to lay hold as a cause of accusation either to priest or to governor, and yet there seemed to be a hostility to all established systems of teaching. The people rejoiced at a liberty of teaching which they only partially comprehended, and the officers wondered at a wisdom different from all which they had ever heard before.

All classes were thus affected by this fundamental element of the moral teaching of Christ ; and yet it was something which Judaism, the system of prescription, could never appreciate or embody. But it made Christ's words glorious with a light which can never die, and which must ever surpass all others. As He, speaking of the Father and revealing the Father, traced every duty to relation to Him, He was erecting the only standard of righteousness which was to be practicable or reasonable in the time of the world's manhood, which He opened. The moral life of these present times has a hard weight to bear. The rapid changes of view to which men's minds are subjected, the wide survey of times and of nations which is opened to them, the fall of prescribed modes of action, the constant demand for new expedients, — all these tend to shake the foundations of duty, and to make the man, with his desires, a law unto himself. The failure to find on many subjects rules that shall be equally binding on all men and under all conditions, gives rise to the feeling that there are no ultimate rules of life, and that all action is a mere thing of expediency. And under such difficulties the wonderful side of Christ's teaching comes out more powerfully than ever, as He brings service and relation to God into sight as a law for every man's life, as the power which

made strong religions of prescribed laws and ordinances, but which is all the more necessary and evident under the freedom of modern life. Each duty is sacred, and all duty is holy. Under God's leading there must be progress, but at each step of that progress the voice of the Father is as imperative as at any other. In a world full of God's children in every stage of growth and of privilege, there will be a variety of standards and of duties; but each man by the words of Christ is called to hang his duty on the great commandment of love to God, where it shall be strong and firm. Christ said of His own words, "They are spirit and they are truth;" and so they have proved to be. They have given the living spirit to action, the form of which has long passed away; they have put men in sympathy with truth, even though their particular view of it has been distorted and false. None but a great authority on moral action, standing outside of and above the action of ordinary men, could thus have given a law of action which cannot be broken, one the need and meaning of which the world did not appreciate as He first spoke it, but which it has been learning more heartily ever since. What Christ said at the well near Samaria may be said alike of all systems of religion with prescribed duties and ceremonies, of all codes of action which the successive Christian generations

have laid down, of all expedients of organization and reformation in civil and social life which are offered to the ills of suffering humanity: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Over and over again the processes of such systems will have to be repeated. We need say no more to rebuke or to check them than Christ would have said to those Samaritans to prevent them from coming to that well with their buckets for the water which should supply and refresh all their daily life. But, like Him, we can add of Him and of His truth, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." He is a spring of moral power that never fails. If men leave Him, if His words are neglected, it is because the sources of life are not wanted; because temporary expedients are overvalued; because the present, with its methods, occupies the whole range of vision; because we are back with the Jews of the first century, and do not stand with the Christ of every century. One word of His, lifting the whole range of duty, placing each man in the presence of God, His Father, rightly heard with willing heart, must make men exclaim, "Never man spake like this man."

The personal element in Christ's words is as

striking and valuable to us to-day as it was to men of those times. When scribes taught as having no authority, as simply the transmitters of the words of the past, as the collators or interpreters of laws which had been given long before, they were lost in a system which had no place for the living soul of the man himself. In such a system that living soul was not necessary ; it was an intrusion. And when Christ spoke to men with a tone of authority, the people heard Him gladly ; not only because that tone revealed His power to them, but also because it revealed them to themselves ; they felt no longer like parts of a great legal national machine, but like the men who, first hearing the law from Moses, had been incited to go on and found the new Israelitish nation. Wherever Christ's words have gone, declaring His power and supremacy, calling men to Himself with an authority and confidence which is unlimited, the sound of such a voice has awakened the soul of man to a new recognition of itself. This is the message that it would speak to men to-day. The great extension of the study of nature, the wide views of the system of natural laws, has made it necessary. The very mind that has studied, and the very soul that has appreciated, those laws, has lost sight of itself under the magnitude of its new discovery. The material forces of life have seemed to be every thing,

and the living soul of man has been pushed aside as one of the factors in the problem of human life. What has gone on in philosophy has reflected itself in practical life. The path of success has seemed to lie in the larger control of material substance, which all the discoveries of a modern time have made possible. Men who have found that path assert their power brutally, in accordance with the nature of that on which they pride themselves; men who have failed to find it are discouraged at the sight of the forces that are arrayed against them, or strive to seize for themselves what they think constitutes the true source of power. The personal word of Christ is a very strong one to such a state of affairs. The simple peasant form, without advantages of inherited or ecclesiastical position, with none of this world's power or wealth in His hands, saying, "Come unto me," promising crowns and thrones to His followers, telling of His near relation to the Father and of His future glory, looking back to days before Abraham, and forward to times beyond the destruction of the heavens and the earth, placing Himself above Solomon, and making Himself greater than Moses and the prophets, — that is a figure which gives just the lesson of our times. It adds consistency to His words. His constant protests against the things of this world, and His warnings to the rich, are the call to seek and to use the

same power which made Him strong; His regard for the poor and suffering is the recognition of the soul within them; His words of exhortation, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" are akin to His proud and contented declaration, "I am not alone, because the Father is with me." As He exalts Himself, He exalts us. He speaks to that mysterious power of the soul within us which God gave, to which all increase of knowledge has not been able to give one new revelation, which for its strength demands new words from God, just as itself, when kindled anew in the successive generations of men, is the only really new thing which the world ever acquires. When He who thus speaks to men tells us that He is the Son of God, we believe Him by reason of His words, for never did other man speak so. It is just what we expect; it is but the natural completion of His message. His declaration of Himself is not only inseparable from His words, and something without which they fall to pieces, but it is the message which the human soul is looking for. In the midst of all changes of doctrine it continues. The human mind works with the great revelation; it just thinks that it has expressed the mystery in words, when a new turn in the wheel of human thought throws the neatly formed doctrine into confusion, and sends us back to Christ Him-

self, that we may learn from Him of the great revelation of God. Personal power such as Christ exercised, personal authority such as is embodied in His words, if it did not point to God, if it had not come directly from Him as its source, would have been the destruction of the world long ago ; it would have been another rebellion of sin, worse than any by which man first fell. It would have sought some basis, and found it, as civil or ecclesiastical systems have done time after time, in worldly position and material advantages. But Christ is as simple a source of authority as He ever was. He has changed no more than have the laws of God's universe, as man has turned them to his various purposes. He still speaks to the souls of men, joining Himself and His Father inseparably together : " Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

There is no deeper cause of thankfulness, then, than that we can get to Christ Himself, and learn His words of life from Himself to-day. To give men that privilege, to regain it or to keep it intact for them, has been the purpose of every true religious reformation, or revolution, or revival ; they have all been successful in proportion as they have done that. They may have left other things untouched ; but in doing that, they were strong. It should be the one object of all religious progress and enlightenment to-day. We may shatter old

idols of tradition, only to put more symmetrical ones of modern knowledge in their place. But it is not the ugliness of the idol that constitutes its danger: it is, that it obscures the great living Person whom it professes to represent. Let Christ speak for Himself. It is probable that those officers were very prejudiced as they approached Christ to seize Him. The constant misrepresentations of Pharisees, the occasional hearing of the distorted ideas of enthusiastic disciples, must have sent them there little prepared for what befell them. But the great Saviour of all men was too powerful for all adverse influences. His words made that body of men bold to return to their superiors, and to assert a truth which has never failed since. By the use of that power of words which we men are misusing every day, He turned the whole current of their thought and feeling toward them. Transmitted by means which the world has also misused, those words are also with us to-day. Who can doubt that they are equally potent, and that every human soul that loves duty can to-day find in them that same revelation of the power of God, which is the only hope of life eternal?

IV.

GOD THE POWER OF MAN'S SOCIAL LIFE.

"Rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." — PROVERBS viii. 31.

THERE has always been recognized, as running through the Book of Proverbs, a strong personal tone, which binds together all its parts. All its good advice and practical wisdom are uttered as coming from the lips of some living person. Either Solomon gives the advice as from himself to his son, or he repeats the words of wisdom as he has heard them from his father, or, as in this eighth chapter, Wisdom speaks of herself as a person, describes her character and life, and pictures her followers as closely connected with herself personally. If we lose this spirit from it, we lose much of the profit of the book. It falls apart into a number of detached precepts, none of which lend any help to each other, and which confuse us by their very multitude. This particular chapter, by its details, and by the way in which Wisdom pictures herself standing by God,

rejoicing the heart of God, and working with Him, shows that this personification which runs through the book is no mere trick of rhetoric to draw and keep men's attention. If it were, it would have no real power. But when Solomon spoke of wisdom, he really meant somebody who would stand by a man, and help him in what he had to do; he conceived all true wisdom as the words of a living soul speaking to other living souls. He did not believe there could be any true wisdom without such a soul behind it. The words of our text carry out this idea to its truest result. Wisdom has been describing how she was by God as one brought up by Him, how He and she rejoiced in each other: and then she says, In all that work of creation I wished to be not only with God, but with God's creature, man; my special joy was in that part of the earth where man could dwell,—“rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth.” I delighted to be wherever man was,—“my delights were with the sons of men.” Only living souls delight to be with living souls. Animals in their natural state flee the footsteps of man; the parts of the earth habitable by man must be left by them: the buffalo is extinct where American civilization has advanced. Nature shows her brightest colors, and revels in the greatest magnificence, where men cannot see her; and, when they come,

her glories in great measure pass away. But, because she is a living soul, true wisdom remains — nay, lives with greater delight — wherever man abounds. It is that link of personality which binds us to God.

We want a personal wisdom, if wisdom is to dwell among men. All our experience tells us that. We have heard and read a great deal of good advice in life, but we all know the surpassing power of that which has come with the force of a living soul back of it. We treasure to-day in a manner out of all keeping with its intrinsic importance some word or custom left us by a parent or teacher or friend. We trace back some word which for generations, perhaps, has guided those with whom we are connected. It comes now sacred to us because many living people have used it, and spoken it to others. Where did it come from first? How did it come first to have any power? Was it spoken out of the air? Did it come from the law of an inanimate earth? It never could have been strong enough to have moved living men, if that were its origin. We hear some man speak, and his words have a far greater force than his writings ever convey. Perhaps the very thing he is trying to prove is, that man's personal influence is of no importance. And we believe him, just because his personal in-

fluence is so great; because he seems so honest or wise, or is so enthusiastic, we say we are convinced. But we go away, and think a great deal more of the man than of the theory. We are influenced by the impress of his character in every act of our lives, while we forget the theory, or keep it only for a discussion. A man of power cannot argue away the power of man's soul: he is all the time speaking against himself. He can point to a greater personal power; he is a witness to that fact of personal power, and can use his own witness to point men on in that line. He can say, "If you believe in me, you ought to believe in that greater Power who made me what I am. If you delight in my wisdom, you ought to delight in Him who is the source of all wisdom." But he cannot say, "If you believe in me, you ought not to believe in anybody;" and for that reason a man is doing his true work only when he is pointing to God. That is a work which can employ all his powers: there is no contradiction in that. But when he is doing any thing less than that, his life is all disorganized; now he points upward by his personal power, and now he points downward by his low theories, or base tastes, or earthly inclinations. If we would be true to ourselves and true to our fellow-men, we must be true to our God. We must have Him close to us as a reality; we must hear Him as

a person ; we must know that all wisdom comes from Him. Solomon spoke of what his father had taught him ; but then, when he was conscious of still greater wisdom within him which his father never gave him, he knew that that, too, must have a personal voice to speak it, or it would not be strong. Shall we constantly listen to human voices and be swayed by them, and not listen to the voice of God ? Every man can testify that he has, time after time, violated some law of morality, or stumbled in some crisis of his life, because the word of wisdom was so vague ; it came he knew not whence, and it was silenced by his warm personal desires. Israel had the law given to it written by the finger of God ; they had heard the voice of God speaking out of the smoke of Sinai : so must we hear, and be conscious of God as a personal God ; so do we need religion, which is the knowledge of the personal God, to make us wise unto salvation. And we can see, therefore, how absurd and contradictory is any idea that religion is intended primarily for ascetics far away in their retreats from the habitations of men, or for theologians busy over their books. Meditation and study are useful in this just as they are in any other matter that we are going to carry on among men. But it is our relation to men that is to open to us our relation to God, the personal God, in its truest light. Wisdom rejoices

in the habitable parts of the earth, not in the monastic retreats of a dreary desert or wilderness ; Wisdom's delights are among the sons of men, not in the midst of books. The inestimable advantages gained in those places only become wisdom as they are used among men, just as the wheat, growing on some distant prairie, where few eyes ever rest upon its beauties, becomes food only as it reaches the crowded city, where men are longing for it, and would die without it. Wisdom is in the world, where men are ; she delights to be there : we need not leave the world to find her, if we will only hear the voice of God just where we are. The sins and failings of men can speak warnings to us ; the needs of men can stir our activities ; the kindness and goodness of men can point to God's greater love. Everywhere hands point up to God and our true relations to Him, if only we will let Him be as real, as truly personal, as the rest of the world is to us. This very life that we think has no God in it is full of such a God. And our excuses for not hearing God because of the presence of the world about us, only call forth the answer, If you are really and truly in the world as God meant you should be, why do you not find God there ? You say that you value the world : why do you not get at its greatest feature, — God's life within it ?

The personification of wisdom in the Book of Proverbs has always been considered to be Solomon's statement of the person of Christ, and it is called his prophecy of Christ. Every great character of the Old Testament foretold of Christ in his own way. Moses, the man who had received the law in the midst of the awfulness of Sinai, who had led the people, almost against their will, up into a land flowing with milk and honey, saw, as his picture of the great coming One, a prophet who should speak the law of God with power and persuasiveness, which should make the people hearken and follow. David at one time, in his shepherd or his outlaw life, saw a shepherd and a sustainer in troubles arise; in the days of his rising kingdom he saw a regal power, the perfect king, of which he was but a type, coming to rule in peace, and subdue all nations to his sway. Solomon most naturally, the man whose mind was strengthened, whose preference was for the gift of wisdom before all other things, thought, When God shall appear on earth, He will be the personification of wisdom,—one whom all will be able to follow and to know as their master everywhere. We need not say that all those great men understood about the coming of Christ, or prophesied consciously of Him. But the great fact is, that Christ fulfilled all their desires and all their

dreams, and that He supplied a different want to each of them. Just as He is different to all of us to-day, supplying to one comfort, another wisdom, another strength against temptation, so the great figure of Him that was to come made itself felt to those worthies, as it said to each, "That which you desire and are striving for shall be supplied in its best form." And in this case of Solomon it is a noble idea, that, when the wisdom of God comes to the earth, it is to come as a person. It is not to be written in a book, or manifested in some wonderful and strange arrangements: it is to be a loving and sociable person, one who rejoices in the habitable parts of the earth, and whose delights are among the sons of men. That will be the nearest approach to heaven that men can ever have. The wisdom of God has always been written on the earth which we tread under our feet, as well as on the planets that roll over our heads. The wonders of the sea are as great as those of the sky; the lifting of a man's hand is as remarkable, in all that it implies, as is the spreading of an archangel's wing. But the archangel knows God, and feels His personal presence, where the man sees Him in His works. Give to the man the wisdom of God personally present with him in all his dealings, and as a part of his surroundings, and you bestow upon him that which makes his life equal in

dignity and power to any in the universe. That it furnishes that, will be the pre-eminent claim and boast of Christianity; not that it fills men with more wisdom, but that it gives a personality to that wisdom. See, then, how important is that sociable element of the life of Christ. John the Baptist might stay in the wilderness, and dwell on the banks of the Jordan: Christ must delight in the habitable parts of the earth, walk the streets of Jerusalem, pass through the regions of heretical and despised Samaria, and make His home in that rich and populous basin of the Lake of Gennesaret. He retired into the mountain to pray, but it was at night, when men were sleeping. Before He went there He taught and fed the five thousand; after He returned He went immediately to the aid of His disciples toiling on the Sea of Tiberias. He went up to the Feast of Tabernacles when it was at its height, and on the great day of the feast, when all the throng were there, spoke to men so that His enemies declared, "Never man spake like this man." That last great week of His life was spent openly in Jerusalem; only at night He retired to the seclusion of the family home at Bethlehem. Where men were, there He delighted to be; there was His place of work. Never was there a life so open, so little dependent upon seclusion, apparently gathering strength from its work. And must it not

equally be a feature of any view of Christ's life to-day? No strength belongs to the Gospel unless it is an intimate, a sociable thing with us, finding its field of work in daily contact with life, always ready to go with us into any place where our human activities lead us. No true knowledge of Christ is ours unless He supplies to us this place of an intimate friend, embodying in the very best form all the help and power that we are ever gathering from our fellow-men. When the power of a friend's hand is felt, then we must remember the power of that Friend who lasts forever; who is never cold, never estranged, never dies. We like to think that all Solomon's admonitions to brotherly love and assistance, of which we feel the truth every day, found their fulfilment in that great Son of man who fulfilled also his great picture of personified wisdom. Nay, the very warnings of our sinful fellow-man, — are they not repeated in that Cross which held the innocent sufferer, and which told forever the terrible penalty that sin carries, and which was borne by Him who suffered for us? "The place where Jesus was crucified was near unto the city," wrote the Gospel historian. It is true to-day. That Cross is near unto this city, near to all our lives in all its parts, near enough for us, in all its manifold cares, to have the picture of its perfect love before us. We are passing it every

day in all our life, drawing close to the very things that made up its power. It is for that that Christ came down and died for us, — that we might know the personal love and forgiveness of our God, and go after Him in dutiful service, with loving hearts. There is no acceptable service without that ; there is no wisdom that is a dead set of laws. And therefore Christ is our salvation, since He is the wisdom of God and the power of God coming near to us to lead us and guide us. For that reason, where is there any salvation out of Him ?

Wisdom delights in the habitable parts of the earth, and rejoices to be among the sons of men. Can it always be so ? How often we tire of the very noise of our fellow-men, and wish to flee afar off, and be at rest ! Wisdom cannot feel that exhaustion. But how often the most habitable parts of the earth are the very homes of the foolishness of sin ! We see their wickedness and foolishness : must not wisdom itself see it much more ? Are the social regulations of our life to-day likely to please the heart of wisdom, and make her long to be among them ? How much true wisdom do they cultivate among those who are devoted to them ? Wisdom may be in our streets, but it must be as a very sorrowful resident, as she sees soul after soul that she loves lost in the desire of gain, associating with its fellow-man only for selfish purposes.

The souls might delight her, and make her stay ; but would the lives, which she saw those souls leading, do so? What can we do to make society and life generally worthy of this great presence which is ever in it? No laws, no customs, no institutions, that we can establish for business or the State, no prescriptions that we may make for social life, will do the work ; for those are impersonal, and what we have seen to be valuable to the world is the personal presence of wisdom. And that must find its expression in our personal lives. All that makes society attractive, or city-life prosperous, to-day, came from God, and in that fact has its power for us. For that reason, it cannot be ignored or put out of sight. But why, then, is it so dangerous to us? Because it destroys our sense of personal responsibility, which is the great thing by which we are to show forth the true character of God's wisdom. How many men are doing things because they are necessary, they say, because everybody does them, though often their consciences may condemn them! How many women live in a way in society which they know destroys all earnestness and spirituality, because it is unfashionable to do otherwise! They, with living souls, do not dare to break away from the trammels which some impersonal custom and usage has put upon them. Do we not want, then,

in daily life, a deeper appreciation of the wise man's crowning picture of the personality of wisdom? Be followers of Christ, personal friends of Jesus. No matter what others do, stand out for what your own soul tells you to be right. To dare to take such a stand requires full conviction that wisdom is personally with you. None but a Christian can do that, and a Christian can never do any thing else. Recognize the fact that Christ is in all that is good, and that by being true to Him you cannot possibly get out of the stream of the world's true life. You will have to leave some things that are false, you will have to condemn them by leaving them ; but all which truly belongs to men must ultimately be the possession of those who have the wisdom whose delights are among the sons of men. Young men and women who are feeling now what a glorious thing this world is, to whom it belongs in all its fulness, will you miss this its greatest possession, — that personal wisdom which fills it all? Will you not open your hearts to God, that you may know and understand the pleasures of God's world? Take them as from a heavenly Father ; take them as servants of Christ ; take them as being yourself filled with the spirit of Him who made them, that you may know how to use them rightly ; take them as personal things, not as mere playthings dropped into your

lap. A great responsibility rests on you, one that no other can fulfil. As you, fired now with the ambitions and excitements of the life of gain or honor that opens to you, or charmed with the glitter and pleasures of society that invites you, put your personal life into Christ's keeping, and determine that as His servant, and relying on His strength, you will be personally wise in your work, will do nothing that will injure your character, and will be more anxious for God's approval than for man's praise and glory, you will do your part to make the world a fit dwelling-place for God. It is useless for others to preach or plan for the purification of either the world's business or politics or amusements, unless those who make up that world in its greatest activity are filled with that spirit. It is the spirit of Christ in those who form society, that will be able to frown down wrong, rebuke vice, and destroy dishonesty.

We cannot go out of this world. Our relations here to each other are the test of what we are. Man is and must be a social being : solitary confinement kills him. Is it not a great thing, then, to learn that our God in all ways answers this demand of our lives ? He loves to be among us ; He is never far from us. How often He must long to speak to us, and to hear our recognition of Him answer back to His love for us ! We use His habit-

able earth, we mingle with and delight in our fellow-men, His creatures : we can do at least as much for God. Rejoice in Him, delight in being where He is, follow always the man Christ Jesus, and then God and man will dwell together in our hearts, and the world shall be really and steadily advancing toward that time when the habitable parts of this earth shall be the very dwelling-place of God in all its thoughts and actions.

V.

MAN'S POWER DEPENDENT UPON HIS KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

“And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?” — EZEK. xv. 1-4.

THROUGHOUT the Old Testament the figure of a vine is constantly applied to the people of Israel. The nation was a vine which had been transplanted from Egypt to Canaan; God's care of it was like a husbandman's care of his vineyard, — active, precise, and full. His justification of His demands upon them was, “What could I have done more for my vineyard that I have not done for it?” The one object of that planting and care was, that the nation was to produce rich fruit for its Lord; its one glory was to be the abundant clusters that hung upon it waiting for His gathering, and ready to yield their rich juice in His wine-press. All these items of the comparison get a new force,

however, from the way in which it is carried on in our text, taken from the prophecy of Ezekiel. The nation had sinned, and now refused to acknowledge its sin. Proud from the memories of the glory which God's blessing had given it in the past, it refused all further care from God; it would take care of itself; it would not submit to God's punishments, which came by reason of their rebelling against His control; it would fight and conquer, independent of God. So God, through His prophet, carries out His figure of a vine. What is a vine, compared to other trees? Who would use it for any work? What strength is there in it, even to make a pin? What substance is there to it, to make it fit even for firewood? It crackles, burns right away, and is gone. A vine-tree that bears no fruit is more contemptible than all else. By this figure, then, God would show the people how necessary He is to them. It is not by accident that He has blessed them in the way that He has. It was the only way in which they really could be blessed, and they were not at liberty to choose any other. The knowledge of God as their Master, and the stern moral training to which He had subjected them, were the only things upon which they could rest their hopes. They would see the wisdom of His action as they gradually found how unsuited to other work they really were, and how little they

could accomplish in other fields. Surely, it has ever been so in the case of this people to whom God spoke by the prophet. All history has shown this parable to be true. It was the moral and religious power of the Jewish nation which was their strength. When they abandoned that, they failed. Other nations exceeded them in material resources, other minds surpassed them in philosophical acuteness and power of expression, other people are identified more surely in history with pictures of great wealth and Eastern magnificence; but through all ancient literature that wonderful people are ever appearing as the holders of a strange and powerful religion, which in some way had an influence out of all proportion to the power of the people who propagated it, which gained an influence over men of all nations and ages, and held captive, time and time again, the very conquerors of the land. In all historical comparisons that nation must always be most prominent which started with the Ten Commandments for its first law-book, and has transmitted to nearly all the civilized world its principles of moral action. That is a conquest more lasting than any which the armies of Rome, or the philosophers of Greece, or the dynasties of the East, could ever accomplish. The vine as a vine, did a work which as a tree, as mere wood, it could not ac-

comply ; its clusters did for the glory of God and the blessing of man what its branches never could accomplish.

This parable and its fulfilment lay down the principle, that what God offers is the only thing that is good for us, and that comparative failure awaits us in any other paths than those of His opening. God's offers in this light are commands. We are free to accept them as far as our will goes, but we are bound to accept them as far as our nature goes. God, in offering, always has a tone of freest invitation ; but all the time, from our own lives, if we would only hear it, there is constantly arising the loudest command to us to accept His offers. The soft and sweet element is in God's own will, which would have us His children ; the stern element is in our lives as men, which are failures without the possession of just those things which God offers in religion. Those things are moral power and knowledge of Himself. And when we consider ourselves without those things in this world of ours, does not the parable of Ezekiel, of the vine-tree, which tries to make itself useful without bearing fruit, apply to man everywhere and at all times ? For compare our physical powers with those about us : they are nothing at all. Let a man train himself to all the strength possible, and he cannot grapple with one of God's wild animals. Let loose the lion

on the strongest man, and human nature must yield. You harness the horse to draw your carriage; you employ a machine to do your hard work surely and rapidly. You know that your fellow-man is not suited to those purposes. Man is the weakest thing in all creation. Or, you turn to mental power, the power of contrivance, the fitting of means to ends; none of these, as we see them in man, can compare with the contrivances of the animal kingdom. Every smallest creature, and some of them by wonderful skill, provides precisely what he wants for himself in shelter and food; and who of us does as much for himself? Who can do his work as systematically or thoroughly as the animals? Who feels as completely satisfied with the result? Or, look at beauty and its realization. The artist power in man has worked at it for centuries, and yet its only ambition to-day would be to be able to depict the beauty of the human figure, or to reproduce nature's own pictures. On every side there are powers at work which arrive at more beauty than man, with all his thought, can ever reach. Leave out moral power, and leave out the desire of man to go upward, and what is he but the weakest and most dissatisfied creature on earth? What is this vine-tree, then, more than any tree? Will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Is it meet for any work? Understand the position

of the Bible about man, and see how true it is. "What is man," says the Psalmist, "that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" David said this when he considered the heavens and the moon and the stars; and surely we men, who, with all our wisdom, have never yet moved one heavenly body out of its course, and are still looking up into the heavens like little children gazing out of the window at twilight, and who feel so proud if, like those children, we can only say, "I think I see another star," surely we are not yet ready to wipe out the record of the insignificance of man. We read over Jehovah's challenge to Job to explain the mysteries of the universe and to control the powers of the natural world, and we feel that the Bible of modern science would add a thousand such chapters on the helplessness of man amid the various circumstances which surround his life, and hold him captive, and compel him to be what he is. St. James's challenge, "What is your life?" has a deep meaning as it is echoed to us from all the graves that are taking away what seems to us powerful and beautiful in life; and the parable of the rich fool has its real significance doubled in these days, when men are able to heap up such fortunes as kings alone could once possess, and yet are compelled to leave them and their power to pass into the hands of others. The power of man over

the things of this world sinks into insignificance in the midst of such sights, which are so striking in these days of human greatness. Many a vine-tree leaves not enough substance behind to make a single peg to hold the slightest burden. The Bible is true ; nowhere, in no department, is man's relative importance increased ; everywhere new limitations are constantly springing up. More than ever man is shut up to his own proper life of rich fruit-bearing work for good purposes. More than ever we know, that, if man is going to triumph in this world, it is to be by the deeper cultivation of character, and by his moral and spiritual superiority to the rest of creation. Whatever cultivates that, offers the true line of action, to which a man must devote himself. Be proud of any thing but your own power to know God, and to reach out after Him, and to aspire to be like Him in moral character, and you are wasting your life. All nature puts you to shame. The lily in the field still says to us, and to our attempts to rival it, "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Learn that lesson everywhere, and at once we begin to rise. Be humble, see how the riches of the world dwarf any fortune you may succeed in making, how the power and beauty of the inanimate or animal creation throw into the shade any thing that you may accomplish, and at once you will begin to seek

the true riches which God alone can give, and which man alone, of all God's creatures, can possess. Humility is the gate of entrance into power always. Go and sit down in the lowest seat at the world's feast, see how other things surpass you, and then soon you will hear the voice of the master of the feast saying, Friend, go up higher. "Then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee;" then shalt thou learn thy superiority, as God's child, over all other things in the world; then will all things be yours. For then you will begin to be God's vine; you will develop just those things in which the vine excels, — dependence, life, and fruit. You will lean more on God, when you hear the world's lesson that you cannot stand alone; you will search after Christ, and be joined with Him, as you see your weakness; you will feel the need of God's being close to us in Christ, as you see how necessary God is to man for man's own glory and success; you will put your energy into the work of producing fruit for God, when once you learn that that fruit is the only means of strength that man has open to him. You will try to have God see your power in the fruit, and not simply man see it in the size to which you grow; you will look for His approval more than for man's admiration and praise. Be not dismayed when sometimes God reads you a lesson of your

weakness, by taking from you that in which you trust. You ought to read that lesson all about you in moments of the greatest prosperity; and, because you will not, God, by some stroke of His providence, says to you, in your pride, "Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree?" How often, when we have grown on our vine-tree some branch that we think will be a cause of admiration to men, God cuts it off! and He always does it that we may produce fruit, and not mere firewood or wooden pins. If God has given you other things, do not be proud of them, and remember that they do not make up your life; do not devote yourself to them. These little glimmerings of other than moral power that appear in man are not to make up his life any more than the little traces of intelligence or affection in the animal constitute his life. The dog is best who does his duty, not the one who sits up most cunningly and begs. That is a mere curiosity which we value only because it is out of its place. So let us be what God made us to be. Be God's servants, not mere owners of property, not mere ornaments to society, not mere seekers of pleasure; for that is not your calling or your true strength. The conclusion of that Forty-ninth Psalm none of us can deny to-day: "Man that is in honor, and *understandeth* not, is like the beasts that perish."

We have seen that man's strength as man, compared with the rest of creation, is in knowing God. Now let us see that it is likewise the strength of the individual man, as compared with his fellow-man, to know God. A man's real strength, in comparison with others, is to be himself, to bring out just what he has in him. And yet it is sometimes hard to see how this is to be done. We are all very much alike in our abilities and surroundings. It is sometimes humiliating to see how our best achievements, our brightest thoughts, on which we pride ourselves, are suddenly reproduced by other men, just when we thought that we were surpassing them, or had struck out a new line of action. What is the difference between the individual power of a school of children enjoying the same teachers, using the same books, with very much the same surroundings in life? It is a difference in moral power that will determine for each one his place in life. That one who has high ideas, noble ambitions, lofty pictures, will succeed in life. It is not what is around us, but what is in us, that brings out our power. Two vines will be just alike in the amount of food that they furnish for the flames, or the amount of strength that they can put into wooden pins that are made out of their branches; but, when they produce fruit, then you know the difference be-

tween them. It is as a fruit-bearing vine that each shows its innermost nature. So we find our place in life by the way we live for God. In God's vineyard each vine has its own peculiar kind of fruit to bear. A power that goes down deep into our souls will bring out varieties of character which more superficial forces cannot possibly reach. Every man ought to assert himself. Men and women have no right to be like so many bricks in the social structure,—all cast in one mould, all of one hue and shape. If out of our faces and in our actions, there appeared the power of God's love working upon us, if each of us appreciated the privilege of being a child in God's family, surely it would not be so. Two children are never precisely alike in a family: the deep family life finds out the difference. No other force in life can bring out the power of each man. But this one glorifies us all; it goes into the life of the humblest son of man, and finds out just what God has put there; it makes that man bold to stand up and declare himself, because he is a vine of the Lord's planting: his clusters may be few, but they will be his own. In other things—in wealth, in power, in knowledge—others may surpass him; but those are not the things that are the test of a man. Those things are to pass away; in those every man is weak: but in character, in knowledge of God, he has his

own treasures brought to his own individual soul by God's own hand in His own way; and it is that which makes him strong where the strength of man alone lies. The hope of the individual man lies in the knowledge of Christ. If you would know your own place in life, and fill it, and cease to be one of a crowd of men, get the knowledge of the Saviour, who can alone teach you of God; depend upon Him, draw your life from Him, produce your fruit for Him. Let Him deepen your moral life. Seek not the things of this life, which, if you succeed in obtaining, will only place your name a little higher or lower in a list of others who are very much like you; but strive for that knowledge of God which shall write your individual name in the Lamb's book of life, never to be blotted out, the name of a child of God.

Let me make one more application of the prophet's parable; that is, to the Christian life. Mankind is God's great vine, and every man is a vine; but above all, those whom God has chosen constitute the great vine, the peculiar people like Israel of old, whom He has chosen to bear fruit for Himself. The object of Christianity is to do that, and it should never be used for any thing else. It should never be made to kindle a light flame, that we may feel ourselves comfortable at it; it should never be made a mere peg upon which to hang the easy,

conventional morality of the times. Christianity is a struggle to produce fruit for God; it is to do what nothing else can do: it is never to be degraded to other uses. When we come in contact with any thing that is called Christian, let us see that we use it rightly. Christian services are not to be used to please our æsthetic tastes; Christian truth is not to be a mere weak substance for us to be sentimental over; Christian churches and the attendance on them are not to be used as the stamp of social standing, or as a badge of good intentions; Christian profession is not to be a formality with which to satisfy our consciences; Christian doctrine is not to be a mere subject of discussion. To use this strong, fruitful Gospel of ours in any such way is like using a vine for firewood. There are plenty of things in life that will answer any of those purposes alone better than this Christianity of ours can possibly do. The vine will only be destroyed, and do no good. But Christianity is to make us better men and women; it is to make us God's servants in all that we do; it is to make us know that He is our God, because He has sent Christ to be our Saviour; it is to raise our standard of life, and make us know that we are sinners; it is to tell us that our sins are forgiven, and to make us firm, by the love of God in us, to turn from those sins, and walk in newness of life. Let

that be the way we hold our Christianity out to men, in word and in deed, as we use it thus ourselves. Such a power men need ; such a power Christ alone can supply. There is none of us that does not demand it by the very fact of his manhood, and that cannot receive it from our Saviour. So we shall all be vines bringing forth fruit for the Lord.

You remember Jotham's parable in the ninth chapter of Judges: "The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them ; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees ? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees ? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees ? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow : and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon." Is it not a parable of our life ? "Come, and reign

over us," cry all things below and around us; "take the sceptre ; be powerful." The true voice answers, "I will not leave my fruit for God." Only the bramble will accept such a call. God says, "Stay in your place ; do your best work for me." He sends Christ to help us do it ; as we wish to do that, we will rejoice in Him, and accept Him as our Master.

VI.

FAITH IN GOD AND IN CHRIST.

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." — JOHN XIV. 1.

A TROUBLED heart is not a pleasant thing ; and he who can ease one such heart, or lighten one human care, deserves the honor and praise of his fellow-men. But he who should go farther, and put a stop to all troubles, would be more than human : he would stand beside God, and be carrying out God's work, since on man, the child of God, he would be bestowing that which would truly make him what he should be. When, then, Christ prepares to give His disciples advice and power, which, in all the difficulties and troubles that were before them, should keep their hearts still and confident, we cannot wonder that He claims for Himself a position in their lives which hitherto God alone had held. The greatness of His work prepares us for the bold statement, " You will be happy if you believe in me as implicitly as you believe in God. As hitherto your faith in God has given you comfort and strength : so, to remove all the remainder of

care and trouble, to strengthen you for all the trouble which is before you, you must believe in me."

So Christ connects His power to still the troubles of man, with the power of God to do the same thing. If there is no power in belief in God, there is none in belief in Him; but if that belief in God is the most valuable thing in life, then the belief in Him should be sought and held with greatest tenacity.

How much the belief in God had done for that Jewish nation, of which those disciples were loyal citizens, every one knows who has read his Bible with any attention. It had supported the hearts of leaders and people through many strange adversities; it had given a unity to the history from Abraham to Christ; it had inspired judges and prophets to lift their voices in the days of the nation's depravity and sin. Every man felt the dignity and power of belonging to a nation specially called and chosen to do God's work. For many years, and even centuries, hearts had laid aside their trouble, because they believed in God. The whole Old Testament is given us, not to illustrate the power or goodness of men, — the sins of its heroes refute such an idea as that, — but to show forth, by the details and by the unity of the history, the power of a belief in God. And the same belief

in a God works in the same way to-day. A man is diligent, self-sacrificing, and earnest in his business : he has maxims of high integrity, of unswerving honesty, of unremitting diligence ; he believes in them, and in their avenging power. For himself, as well as for others, violation of those laws must bring punishment. They are above and beyond him ; to them he subjects his comfort, his fortune, perhaps his very life itself. As a reward for such faith, he is bold, confident, and peaceful in his business. And he has his reward, and it is no mean one ; nay, it is a reward from God, — success in life, and respect from other men. We all know such men, and our hearts go out to their steady, quiet, cheerful working, based on the laws of God's universe. Or turn to the student of nature, diligent in finding out the laws of the universe ; meeting difficulties, perplexities, new problems, at every step, but always sure that there is some solution yet to come ; acknowledging that all is not plain, but sure that the course of nature will yet vindicate its reasonableness ; certain that there is such a thing as truth, which is perfectly consistent, and must prevail. Surely in all the history of man, there is no greater example of faith in a higher power, outside the pages of the Bible, than the advance of modern knowledge from step to step, amidst enemies and difficulties, untroubled because so be-

lieving. Better still, look at the moral life around us, — yes, even in one of our great cities, whose secrets of wickedness there is such a temptation to dwell upon with morbid curiosity. Remember that the more places of temptation, of dissipation, of intemperance, and of sin which there are in such a city, the more wonderful is the story of the thousands who, with natures to which all such temptations make their appeal, daily turn from them either with the disgust of genuine aversion, or with the struggle which evinces the existence of better and nobler aspirations. All such lives, making up the multitude of high and low, rich and poor, famous and nameless, which are all about us, tell of belief in a moral power which must not be offended, and which puts the restraint on passions and desires, which, let loose, in one short day would involve the world of men in destruction. There are moral and upright lives which are so without care and anxiety, because they thus believe in God. Why need we shut our eyes to the good, to the courageous, the patient, the pure lives which are about us? Leave to the cynical sneer of the doubter the denial of all honor and purity in man and woman. Let the believer in God be as anxious and eager in tracing His hand through every more or less conscious belief in Him, as he is in watching His movements from the unconscious growth

of the plant to the heartfelt prayer of a Christian. He need have no more timidity in calling such facts of high and noble life belief in God than Christ had in dwelling upon the power and truth of the antecedent Judaism to which He brought a completing revelation. The same kind of belief which made Jewish history strong, makes all life strong about us to-day. It was often not a whit purer in some hero of the warring days of the Old Testament than it is in some man of upright and strenuous character to-day, to whom we are not allowed to give that name of personal Christian any more than we are to that warring, blood-stained hero. Unbelief contradicts to-day one of the fundamental truths of modern knowledge, that all results have some sufficient cause, when it dares to say that the untruth of a personal belief in God, and the still further untruth of a belief in Christ, could have produced and maintained all the developments of religious and Christian life which have blessed the world ever since it was inhabited by man. Such a claim refutes its right to a hearing. But such a fatal error warns us off the same path. We must not throw the manifestations of powerful life around us back on a falsehood as their source and strength. Such manifestations of powerful life mean a great deal ; emphasize them, challenge them, and encourage them everywhere, as things

that are better than the earth. Do not be too anxious to call every careless non-Christian man an unbeliever, or every scientific man an atheist. What makes them all strong is a belief in God. That same belief in God which makes us lie down at night, never worrying as to whether the sun will rise, which makes us strong in a conviction of the regularity and lawfulness of life, must find its expression in many ways through many minds; and, wherever it appears, we may rejoice in it as the strongest and best foundation for action in every life. Any man whose experience in life has been at all varied is able to tell of the way in which new emergencies have brought new strength, and difficulties, in anticipation of which the heart fainted, have been found, on closer view, to have a much less terrifying aspect. And the result of all such experiences is to give to mature manhood and womanhood a certain calm power of going forward, which is a most necessary and satisfactory substitute for the impetuous energy of youth. There is no deeper subject for thankfulness than the way in which God presses Himself on the knowledge and belief of men, even when they do not search for Him, or even desire Him. He shows that He has a Father's longing for them, even in their spurning of His presence; they turn their backs upon Him, think only of themselves, go their own

way, and, lo! they have even then stumbled upon some characteristic or fact of life which is consistent only with the belief in a higher power. We find through all nature the anticipation of Christ, who came to men when they did not ask for Him, who died for men while they were yet sinners. As the Psalmist puts it grandly, "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me." Whatever strength, confidence, quiet, and calm there is to life, that we owe to the existence and knowledge of our God.

We surely have, therefore, as much right to use the first half of Christ's words as had those Jewish disciples to whom they were uttered. And we need not think or fear that the full appreciation of the existence and value of a belief in God will do away with the need of Christ, any more than Christ Himself feared the retort from those disciples, "If we believe in God, why should there be the need of any belief in you?" He knew and they knew how often that belief in God in the course of the nation's history had seemed to fail. It had allowed rulers to grow hypocritical and formal; it had left unlightened many a personal difficulty and doubt and trouble in the minds of the people of the nation. The very difficulty to which they then looked forward, the loss of their Master, was one to which it brought no relief. We can say

the same thing of that great general belief in God which so surrounds all human life as an atmosphere, that such life seems unable to escape from it, and which adds so much quiet and strength to life. There are personal sides to all life's troubles which it does not seem to touch. The very man, so strong in his business-life by reliance upon the laws of God, finds his position in life changed; that business to which he has become accustomed drops from his hands. And how often a strange weakness in personal life shows itself! There is no power to meet the new emergencies, there are anxiety and fretfulness where all before was calm and confidence; the man has got beyond the revelation of God which his business gave him, and he is lost, and therefore trouble has entered. It is the same with human knowledge: it has explained the movements of the heavenly bodies, and it stands beside an open grave, and has not a word of explanation of the future, of all the activity and pomp that descends thither; it traces back the developments of human and earthly existence, and it has not a word to say about the origin of that human soul which is the one valuable thing in life. It is the same with morality, which is so valuable an element in all human life. The actions when no eye of man can see, the thoughts of the heart into which no other one can enter, — those are often

strangely at variance with what is recognized as the necessary and lawful and proper mode of action before men. The confessions of some of the world's purest characters, our knowledge of our own life, and of the secrets of our own consciences, and of the motives of our best actions, tell us that. Men who are calm over great things worry over little things; personal life is full of things which try the temper and trouble the soul, when in wider relations perfect calm and peace exist. And yet it is that sphere of personal life which is the closest and most important; it is the state of that which determines the man's happiness or unhappiness; it is by what goes on in that that the growth of character is determined. It is there that the troubles of life must really be killed. The overpowering and divine belief in God must be felt there also. If it is only by belief in Him and His laws that quiet and calm are gained elsewhere, it is only by the development of that belief that the troubles of that inner sphere can be touched. It is not by the exaltation of self that the work can be done; that would be an attempt to piece the robe of Divine majesty with a substance of mere human manufacture. Men try that, and you see the result in lives which in their public aspect are noble, and in their private lives are despicable; men who are

honest in their business, and contemptible in their families; men who are strong in their business, and self-conceited in all their personal bearing; men who have wide views of public questions, but whose views of their own lives and destinies are so vague that they cannot be at all expressed. God as the ruler of the earth is impressing Himself upon them every day, God as one close to their lives is lost sight of entirely. We see in this light the beauty of that conception of God which David had: "Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth!" That is the thought of God which is going to give calm, and to quiet the trouble of the heart in every form, for that covers all a man's life; that reaches to every corner alike of public and of private action; that meets at once his great and his small difficulties.

This, then, was the place that Christ offered to fill; it was in the confidence of His ability to do so that He uttered these words: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." We understand them when we see that they were intended to offer to a band of humble disciples, in their own hearts and lives, the comfort and strength of that God by whom "kings reign, and princes decree justice;" of that God who "maketh light and

createth darkness ;” of that God who “reacheth from one end to another mightily, and sweetly ordereth all things.” It was a great claim, one which no man can make for himself or for any other, one which can belong only to Him who has within Himself the power of revealing God. How well the claim has been sustained, we can all of us know from the history of those same disciples, from the strong and steady growth of Christian character in knowledge of God, from the power which Christ has shown of solving questions of life and death in which all others have failed, and of relieving troubles for which no others could give any remedy. Personal allegiance to the Son of God extends into the sphere of individual destiny and action that same faith in a greater power, in an overruling hand, by which alone all that is good and strong in this world has ever been accomplished. It unites a man’s public and private life, not by any artificial bond, but by the evidence that that same Father, without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground, and by whom the grass of the field is clothed with beauty, has not neglected to speak to the hearts of His children in the only way in which they could be reached, by the loving voice of a personal Saviour ; it joins to science’s discovery of the continuance and power of matter, that revelation of the immortality of the soul which could only be given by a

living soul ; it adds to the belief in the necessity of goodness, the warmth of motive, for want of which morality is so often cold and unattractive ; it makes the infinity of detail in nature, which the microscope reveals to us, only a foretelling of God's knowledge and care for our smallest anxieties and troubles ; it makes the wondrous adaptations of the world about us, which we love to trace, the counterpart of those many mansions of the Father's house suited to all of us and to our various wants. It is this unity between God and Christ, this oneness of life and Christianity, which is the salvation of both. Some man says, "Why am I always importuned to be a Christian ? I am no unbeliever. My life, my actions, are proof enough that I believe in God : what more can be wanted ?" Christ Himself would take away no such claim ; He would deal with it as He did with the belief in God which surrounded Him in that Jewish nation : "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." He addressed it to every grade of belief ; it was the trial which justified or condemned. The young man who had kept the commandments from his youth up had the test put to him : "If thou wilt be perfect, come and follow me." The Jews, claiming God as their Father, heard from Jesus' lips the same test in the words, "If God were your Father, ye would love me : for I proceeded forth and came from God."

To the disciples it was a word of comfort, and their strong faith in God gladly accepted the invitation to a rich extension ; it was a hard test to the young man, who went away sorrowful, and we know not the result ; it was a word of condemnation to the Jews, proving how all the strength of the knowledge of God had left them, and only the shell remained. The same test is submitted to men's ideas of their relation to God to-day. O moral, faithful, strong men ! why will you not always see that your view of God is never complete and consistent, unless it takes also that knowledge of Him in Jesus Christ, which alone makes it a personal possession, brings it to bear on all the important matters of life and death which beset you as an individual, and lifts from your heart the troubles which are constantly arising ?

Or, if our belief is in Christ, and it seems as if that belief did not keep its promise in protecting the heart from trouble, may it not be because it does not speak to us forcibly enough of the supremacy and power of God our Father in all our lives ? All things are not submitted to Him : there are compromises with duty. His glory is not first in life : other powers besides His are relied upon for happiness and success. More strongly than ever Christ binds our life to the life of God. That is the means, the leading of men to the

Father, by which alone He would free men's hearts from trouble, and make them confident by the power of God. And so forever the key to all Christian life and joy is in the union of those words, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." For all of us they open a way out of trouble, of whatever kind it is, because to all of us they tell of the infinite resources which are still before us in the knowledge of Him, who is our God for ever and ever, and who has come near to us in Jesus Christ.

VII.

THE PLAIN LIFE WITNESSING TO CHRIST.

“And many resorted unto Him, and said, John did no miracle : but all things that John spake of this man were true.” — JOHN x. 41.

JUST before Christ entered on those last stirring events of His life which were to culminate in His death, He retired to the region beyond Jordan. It was a part of the nation which was but little affected by what went on elsewhere ; it was shut up to its own interests, and had little connection with the more active life of the times. Apparently Jesus had never been there before ; news of His doings had doubtless reached those people, but they knew very little of Him, and had never troubled themselves a great deal about His claims or His work. But there was something which gave interest to Him as He came among them. Two or three years before, John the Baptist had been there. He had drawn strangers of all kinds to the vicinity. The memory of his days was the glory of the region ; it had made it

famous. The inhabitants had treasured all the reminiscences of his words and actions. Every thing had been estimated in its relation to that event; every new-comer had been compared to John. The excitement of those crowds that resorted to the Baptist had long ago passed away; but we can all understand how his appearance and work were still the great event of that quiet region, and the story of his doings and sayings was constantly told by one to another. Now, when Christ came, the first thought was to compare Him with John. Here was the very one whose coming John had predicted. Was He greater, or less, than John? Had John spoken the truth about Him? He was of importance, because John had spoken of Him; He had a ready hearing because of that long-remembered visit of the Baptist. There is something very interesting in this dependence of Christ, as it were, upon the Baptist for a ready reception and hearing. This man, long dead, was still preparing the way for His coming. The lesser was opening the path for the greater, and making things smooth before Him. Who can tell how often that takes place? how frequently some word or action, apparently unimportant, just serves to tone men's minds so that the way shall be ready for a great moral change? Who can tell how often some uninflu-

ential character, or some character whose presence and influence seem very transitory, drops the seed for great things that are to come? It is a great encouragement. It multiplies the importance of action many fold. It tells us to go through the world feeling that not far behind us there may be a power which is depending upon our faithful action. If we fail, and consider duty small and unimportant, he may come, and his whole work be lost on account of our unfaithfulness in something that seemed of little importance. Our little footsteps may be the track of a much greater power, and in that confidence we can put down our feet firmly. And then see what Christ did for John and his memory. His work was becoming distant ; it was gradually becoming a thing of the past. When Christ came into that region, He brushed away all marks of oldness that were accumulating on it. At once it was a fresh thing. Men recalled what he said and did, and John was again a vital power in that place. It was a reviving power to have Christ come thus. There is a great pleasure in coming across the marks of a man's work after he is gone, in suddenly having the impression of his work reproduced with greater vividness than ever. It makes us understand something of the meaning of immortality. He who can produce such an effect is a

great blessing to mankind. He who comes, and not only works himself, but stirs up all the good work that has gone before, brings it out to the light, carries it out to its proper end, and makes it genuinely useful,—he is the one who is an effective power in the world. He gives immortality; he makes men live forever, and is felt everywhere as a life-giving power. He is the most unselfish, at the same time that he is the greatest power. It was this which Jesus did wherever He went. He was not a selfish power, separating Himself from all others, declaring Himself alone; but, wherever He went, the good influences of the past gathered round Him, and gave Him new light, as He gave to them new power.

And so in this relation between the dead John Baptist and the living Christ we have the whole subject of the true work of a man's life, and of the best and most lasting work that a man can do, put before us. John the Baptist lived in Christ, and it were well for us to understand how he did so. In the first place, there was a tone of disappointment in the feeling of those people about their hero. John did no miracle. Doubtless the same disappointment had been in their minds during his lifetime. He had drawn multitudes to that desert region; his teaching had been pure and

noble, his character had been unselfish and earnest ; he had started a great moral reformation. But John did no miracle. They had looked for that miracle day after day, and it had not come ; and at last they had been compelled to settle down to the conviction that he was subject to the common laws of life, like other men. They would not give him up, but they were disappointed. Can we not understand the feeling, from our experience with ourselves or with others ? How often we have looked at some man in public life, and expected that he was going to do great things ! We did not quite see how, but, now that he was on the stage, things were to change ; new times were to come, old forces pass away, and new things take their place ; miracles were to be worked. How many a parent has looked at his child with something of the feeling that Eve had when she exclaimed, at the birth of Cain, that she had gotten a man from the Lord, — a man who would do great things ; a man who, by the spirit within him, would defy the hard events about him, and turn them into something better ! The parent knows that he himself is nothing wonderful ; but he magnifies all that the child does, and tries to make out that he is a phenomenon. And I suppose, that, with regard to ourselves, we can all remember the time when it seemed as if no difficul-

ties could stand before us, and we felt that it was not so hard a work to do miracles, and to change things for the better, if only one true-hearted man would be in earnest about it. And then has come the conviction, that, after all, there is an order of things that is beyond man's reach. Our new reformers have disappointed us; each new generation has grown up and passed away without working the great visible change; and we ourselves have felt the tightening cords of circumstance and law drawing round our energy, and binding our activity to a certain round and course of action. Over and over again we have to drop some picture of great changes from our minds, and say that we must be satisfied with things as they are. We could hardly count the men to-day that are going their way, — heads of families, plain men of business, — who once would have spurned any such idea of the confinement of life's energies from their minds, who saw a track reaching into unknown regions, instead of going just where all other men had gone before them. And yet there is something very inspiring in seeing that the belief of men in the miracle-worker still continues; they still look out for him, after all disappointment. They refuse to believe that things are always to continue as they are; they will constantly be believing in this man or this plan, which is going

to work wonders, and accomplish what has never been done before. It is man's great power of hope, and his undying conviction that there is something above and beyond him, that will yet rescue him from all that is hard and difficult. If it is disappointed, it need not be ashamed. If John the Baptist does not perform miracles, at least it is better to have looked for great things, strong in the conviction that they would come, than not to have expected any thing.

And now what is there to take the place of this desire for miracles when it has been disappointed? We must have something; for it is only too easy to settle down, perfectly satisfied with our life as it is, and to ask for no more than the common life of routine and regular action, since we seem to be confined to that. Some there are that have met some tangible disappointment. They had a definite hope of great things, and it faded away; and now they are not going to attempt any thing more: they are going to make the best of life as it is, and be satisfied with that. Others there are who, without any such definite thought, looking for something great which was to come, and not finding it, are going along from day to day, perfectly content with what every day brings, feeling, that, if they cannot be heroes, they can at least draw back into them-

selves, letting thing go on, and carry them with them. It is the story of many a life, which, despairing of any thing beyond this world, lets this present world's life confine all its thoughts. What is the use of any thing more? it says. There is no definite object of exertion beyond the present moment. A new view of life is sadly wanted, that shall take the place of the old one, and save the life from becoming commonplace; and that one thing is, to labor to find out and to tell the truth about this life about us, to speak it so that men shall hear. If we are not original sources of power, if we cannot change things about us by any miracle-working power, at least let us bear witness to the truth, even though it may not always be the easiest thing to do in life. That is the struggle of character and of right action. It is not as fascinating as the prospect of miracle-working, but it is more truly ours, and it is as effective. Man's work is to show the best side of every thing here, — to show it in word and in act. That is the new struggle, that is to fill the void made by any disappointment or by any disappointing view of life. It is to drive out of sight all the dull, cynical spirit which takes things as they are and makes the best of them, and looks no farther. All things have two sides, — their true and their false. We are holding them up in one or the

other to men. We are by our actions making them mere sources of pleasure and of profit, or we are showing that they have deeper uses that God has given them. Time, money, opportunities, social relations, all the surroundings of a plain life, all the commonplace facts of life which are to be found in every man's life in greater or less degree, — how are we regarding them? What are we telling men about them? Have we found out the truth as to them? and are we exhibiting that truth about them to men, or are we holding to them just as is convenient, and telling of them as such to men, and giving our false, worldly ideas of them? This is the basis of all moral exertion, of all true action. It is the greatest work a man can do. We can work no miracle, but the expression as to the true side of every thing can find its way into the world through us; it can come in no other way. It is men's work so to do every thing and to use every thing, that all shall come out in new power. In that view of life arises a new line of ambitions, which can arouse all energy, and nerve a man as no other work ever did. Men will value such work and treasure it. They will gladly see that such work, natural and true as it is, is greater than performing miracles. It leads into the thick of life, not to the solitariness of miracle-working. John the Baptist did such work, and men followed

him out into the wilderness to hear him ; the excitement that he stirred continued long on the banks of the Jordan. Into it he threw all his life ; and from the knowledge of him many a soldier went back to his work and wages, many a publican to his tax-gathering, many a private person to his common life, with a better idea of their duties, as the sins of life and the great hopes of life had been set before them with the forcible power of John's teaching of the truth. They brought back the memory of no miracle, but they brought back something better, — a determination to get at the truth of their life, and not use it wrongly. Oh, plain life, just as it is, is full of riches ! He who believes that, and never gives up the search for them, shall be rewarded by doing a great work. Use it rightly, not slothfully and just for personal ease, and it shall be found to have great things in it ; and no man need be a failure here.

As these men looked back at their hero's words, they found that they had largely been about Christ, who had now come among them, and that all that he had told them about this One, who was to come, had been true. He had pointed to Him as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world ; he had told of all the purity that should be found in His character ; he had predicted that

He should increase, while John himself should decrease. All this had proved true, and thus John had lived again in the appearance of Christ. The truth which he had told had centred in Christ : that had been John's power. He had told those men the truth about their lives ; but, above all, he had told of the great One that was to come. Witness to moral truth, to truth about God and His power, is the greatest thing a man can give. Men want truth on every subject, — they call out for the right side everywhere ; but all that we bring is useless, unless we can tell them something about themselves, unless we can bear witness to some power that can rescue life. There is where all that demand for miracles finds its satisfaction. Men will have them. John did no miracles, but he told of Christ, that did ; and all that he told of Christ was true. And so, placing our own lives beside John Baptist's again, I think that we can perceive what a power the knowledge of Christ gives to a man. It gives him something of which to tell, wherever he goes ; it puts within his own knowledge a power which he can reach out to others. It comes to a plain life that is settling down, and feeling that it had better give itself up to the routine of life, and filling it with nobler aspirations, and telling it of God's friendship and love, inspires it to go out and tell of them to other men, to bear witness to the

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truth. It is a work right in the line of all life's best work, as we have seen ; it is giving us the truth in a shape by means of which we can get an understanding of it in our hearts, so as to bear witness to it. With the conviction of a John Baptist that a power has come to the world that will lay the axe to the root of the trees, that there stands in the world One who can baptize men with the Holy Ghost and with fire, what a work the plainest life could do ! It could leave the miracles all to Him, and it could content itself with showing forth His power, so that men could see it and believe. Such a life would live ; every new visit of this power to which it had borne witness would find the traces of such a man's work. All Christian work would feel its influence, and glorify such a man who had told the truth about such a Saviour. That is the power of a genuinely Christian life. It is possible for all men : each man can take up his common life and make it speak for Christ, as it is filled with the conviction of His power and authority. We say that the day of miracles has passed. And we do not look for prophets with a wonder-working power to come among us. We have learned to be satisfied with our John the Baptists without miracles, and not be disappointed, as those men were, when they come without them. It is a much better position ; it makes it much more possible for

men to be prophets. And can we not go farther, and say that there has been a very great raising of common life, which makes it harder for men to rise above it, and to soar into exceptional prominence, than it used to be? But cannot all this glory of common life be traced to the fact that every man can be inspired with the thought of his calling in the Lord Jesus? Every man is a prophet to-day who is telling of the power of God in his life. The plain life witnessing for Christ is the type of true action among us. How many of us can tell of the fact that some man or woman, going his regular course of duty, has spoken true words as to the power of Jesus of Nazareth, which have blessed us! We want to get the true idea of God in our lives as the real spirit of Christianity. It was just beginning to dawn on the minds of those men that lived beyond the Jordan: they began to understand John's greatness. But it was Christ's work to make the world feel it, and it has been growing ever since.

And yet let us never think that Christianity and telling of Christ are incompatible with the highest stretches of human power. Let the man rise who can do miracles, let the greatest genius break forth, and still it can follow Christ. He dwarfs no man; He makes no man feel that any action is too high if he feels called to it within himself.

For Christ came to change all things, to work miracles by His power on the earth. He has ever done so ; He has shown all power in Himself : and the greatest of human powers can find a place for its efforts in His work. There is a depth of truth in Him which the greatest minds can devote themselves to finding out and declaring. He gives truth to the man of power, and it is that which is wanted for every man. We want no miracle-worker who does not tell of the truth. Bad will it be for the world when it is granted that Christ is but for common minds. He has inspired the greatest minds ; He has drawn to Himself the boldest workers. The few rare minds can find abundant material in Him, who has the whole knowledge and power of life within Himself. But for the great number of men He can do a work which no other can,—ennoble all life, and give them a truth to declare which they can find nowhere else. All can stand close in Him, and go through the world leaving in our lives marks of Him, which others shall recognize, and declare to be the best and truest fruits of life. 'This fact of the power of witnessing for Christ is the pledge of immortality. It is the fact of the resurrection present to-day. How living and natural to us to-day is the expression of a Christian faith uttered years ago ! How many will live hereafter

who have done no great works here, but have uttered true words about Christ! To do that, is to have the power of an endless life, and to pour into daily action that which shall make it eternal.

VIII.

THE SIFTING OF LIFE.

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." — LUKE xxii. 31, 32.

THE figure which Christ here makes use of in order to describe the severe ordeal through which Peter, the most prominent of all the disciples, was to pass, is a very significant one; and we cannot believe that it was used by chance, or without full intention. The sifting of wheat is a most hard and thorough, but a most necessary, process. The wheat, as it has grown, has become associated with the protecting chaff, which it is necessary should be blown away, and with the foreign substances taken from the earth and from the air, which must be separated. Before the wheat is ready for use, it must be sifted or winnowed; no pains must be spared to make the process as thorough as possible. Only an enemy to the wheat, or a disbeliever in its true powers, would desire to spare it such an ordeal. As it falls, after such a

process, into the receptacle which has been prepared for it, solid and clean, its value is greatly enhanced. There is now no doubt about its true nature and the work to which it should be put. It carries out all the points of the analogy to notice that Peter is not promised that he shall be saved from the sifting process : no hand is put forth to hold him securely sheltered ; no cloud wraps him away from danger. Peter is too valuable to be thus treated. If he is wheat, he must be sifted.

And so we learn the great lesson from Christ, that difficulties are as necessary and beneficial for the soul as winnowing is for the wheat. The winds of temptation blow, and the poor, lightly weighted souls are carried away ; while the strong ones are stripped of many things in which they trusted, and the true power of principle becomes more evident in their lives. Take a number of children growing up together, follow them through their lives, and see how, one after another, they drop out under the processes to which they are subjected. The need of application tests the physical constitution which their parents have given them ; the demand for clearness of mind, restraint of appetite, firmness of principle, tells of the nature of the family training which is being given them ; and the temptations to small sins, petty, foolish, conceited ways, and even to vicious

courses, asks as to the principle which from the earliest days has inspired their souls. A school, a college, a professional training, make up a great winnowing place through which cross-winds are ever blowing ; and at the end of the process you look for your number of pure grains of wheat, and they are few, indeed, compared to the size of the great aggregate on which the work first began. And still, under fiercer winds of temptation, which men and women of the world well know, the question of the winnowing floor is always being repeated : Are you wheat, or chaff ? There is the sifting of change of position, the pouring from vessel to vessel, — a process under which the light grains are removed, and which finds its parallel in the change of life's demands. You are rich, and the question the next day is, Can you stand poverty ? or you are poor, and the sudden access of prosperity tests your real ability and weight. Will the one rob you of your spirit, or the other of your humility ? If they will, then you have been sifted with the result of proving that you are but chaff. Changes from joy to sorrow or from sorrow to joy, from light to dark or from dark to light, — those have revealed the substance of many a man to us ; and we have said, "I thought that he could stand it better," or we have exclaimed, "What a noble man he is ! He is just as he was before, not

puffed up by his exaltation, not broken by dejection." And there is the sifting of progress : ideas and men all pass through that. New tests are applied, just as ever new sieves, with closer and closer meshes, wait for the falling grain, with sharper discrimination at each stage of the process. The truth of one generation or one age of life is sifted before it is accepted by the next. Some accretion, some profitless protecting husk, is cast off, and the substance is more valuable than ever. The man finds, after life's experience, that not one particle of the truth as to honesty, virtue, and God has proved itself false, although he smiles at the childish conceptions which enshrined it for him, and which long ago passed away ; and with each generation God's truth is made simpler and clearer to the eyes of all. So in this life of ours the great sifting process progresses. Life is one great machine, combining, like some of the winnowing inventions of modern times, every contrivance which shall separate the chaff from the wheat. What Christ said to Simon, modern knowledge has formalized in that phrase with which it would cover all action and all progress, — "natural selection," "the survival of the fittest." The most active and prominent, the Simon Peters, are most exposed to it ; the battle rages around them most fiercely. They will be winnowed, sifted, poured,

and shaken most persistently ; to them the tests of body, mind, and soul will be most rigorously applied. But all must meet it ; the fact stares all in life, that the sifting process is a reality, and for it preparation must be made.

But what has Satan to do with it? If it is a process universal in life, and belonging to man as made by God, how could Christ say that Satan desired to have Simon, that he might sift him as wheat? Satan rejoiced at the anticipation of this process, and longed to see it begin, because he did not believe that Peter could stand it ; he does not believe that any man can, and he longs, therefore, to see men come under the test. So Satan thought in the Old Testament regarding Job, when his righteousness was displayed to him ; and his faithless sneer, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" has been repeated many times. He is the supreme cynic ; and wherever you find the man who is doing Satan's work, very soon you can perceive this disbelief in the existence of disinterested honesty and virtue alike in man and in woman. There is in such souls a supreme conviction in the power of this sifting process to dissipate all pretences to virtue. Let the sifting be thorough enough, and all good will disappear from the heart of man. The processes used will be the ordinary ones of life. When Satan tried Job,

it was the bands of the Sabeans and Chaldeans, it was the lightning from heaven, the winds from the wilderness, the diseases of the body, which he made use of for his instruments. It was material pitted against spirit, it was the outer against the inner; and the great enemy of man never doubted for a moment but that the former, the material and the outer, must prevail. All sense of the power of the latter, the spiritual and the inner, had passed away from him, and so it has always from the powers of evil. In that material and outward they live, on it they rely, and by it they war. At first it seems to give evil the advantage, for it puts all this universal sifting process apparently on its side. But the meaning of those words of Christ's gradually comes out: "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." The sifting is to be endured boldly and fearlessly, because there is an ultimate kernel of life which it cannot touch. It is a reality, which defies all the processes of ultimate solution that can be brought against it. That is the belief which makes a man strong to endure temptation, brave to pass through all changes, courageous to march with all progress of ideas. It was to the soul that Christ spoke; on it all His work was based. When He had once seen that soul conscious of itself and of its power in the heart

of a man, He was not afraid to let the world sift him, even though he might be a man with as many weaknesses and foibles as Simon Peter. Let them be shaken off and blown away, like corrupting substances or infolding chaff. When that was all done, the man remained.

It is Christ and His Gospel that believes in manhood, and is not afraid of the effect of life upon the true wheat. It says, "Let the process even go so far as to reach the very destruction of the body itself, there is no more to fear; even that which seems to human eyes to be a very necessity of life, even that is only chaff, protecting for a time, but in due time to be cast aside, that the man may live a better and larger life." I know no better illustration of this than the very relation which Christian activity and philanthropy hold to the modern formalized doctrine of natural selection. That doctrine would say, "Let the weak die, let the strongest survive; it is a providential arrangement that it should be so, with which you should not interfere. Whatever has shown, by weakness of body or mind or spirit, its inability to live, ought not to live, had better not live, for its own sake and for the sake of the world." Christian philosophy grants the necessity, the advantage, of the sifting process; but it sees the wheat and its separation as the object of

it all. It says that help can be brought to that; that there, in the kernel of the human heart, is where the process can be influenced; that there is where man differs from all others in the conditions of this sifting. And so it takes the discouraged and weakened soul, which the world cannot use, and is fast killing, and speaks to it words of comfort, and tells it of the object of all this sifting. If it is too late to give it the ability to be useful here, it can prepare it for the gathering into the Master's garner at last. It opens the doors of its hospitals and asylums to the sick and the miserable and the aged, and shields them for a time from the process of destruction, so that the soul within may be made strong to endure, and may learn that it cannot be killed. It takes the puny, sickly infant, and keeps alive the faint spark of life within it, so that it may do the work for which God placed it here, even though it be by a life of deprivation and of suffering. It tells the drunkard, whom the world despises, of the greatness of his soul, and of the love of the Saviour who died to save it; it reclaims, by a message of purity and salvation, the prisoner whom society has marked as dangerous, and as one to be restrained, if not even destroyed. Satan, by all these sifting processes, is claiming these victims as his own, through despair, through ignorance, through

crime ; the voice within joins with the voice without in saying that there is no hope. What life gives, the soul must take without any power of appeal. Life is but a process of judgment, — of approval to some, and of condemnation to others ; of sifting, when the light weights must perish, and only the happy few — if even there be any such, as evil is always maliciously suggesting there are not — survive. But by its revelation of the power of men's souls, and by its words of encouragement and help, the Gospel of Christ declares that to the very centre of the struggle a saving hand can come at all times. It is the world, it is daily life, it is Satan, that speak of judgment and condemnation : it is the Gospel of Christ that tells of progress and salvation.

I think, then, that we can understand that tone of confidence with which Jesus speaks of the trial which is to befall His great disciple. To His eye the conditions are not hopeless. He does not deprecate the struggle, but rather in it anticipates the defeat of Satan. But the tone of confidence is still more sublime when the means of strength and victory are considered. The whole of the sifting process administered by its great master and confident authority, Satan, is to be brought to bear ; and yet Peter will not succumb, because Christ has prayed for him, that his faith fail not.

See how Christ puts Himself against the world. Through that prayer the life of Peter was made strong to bear the ordeal ; through that prayer he was able to defy the world and Satan. Think what Jesus' prayer for Peter must have meant. Jesus was the Saviour for all men. Doubtless in those prayers, which on the mountain, and before the dawn, and after days of restless labor, He offered to His Father, all the disciples, nay, all mankind, were remembered. But this prayer which He offered for one of the first of His disciples ; one who had joined Him at the very opening of His ministry, when as yet no miracle had attested His power, and no fame had drawn multitudes to Him ; one who, with all his weaknesses and failings, had stood firm when others faltered, and had declared, "Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God," — this prayer told of the relation which He had established between that disciple for whom the prayer was offered, and that Father to whom it was offered. He stood between the two. He doubted not that He was the Master of the one and the well-beloved Son of the other : both had acknowledged Him and their connection with Him ; the one speaking from the earth, and the other from heaven. Through Him to that human

soul, tried, tempted, sifted, the strength of its God had flowed ; through Him to the Father in heaven, loving, forgiving, sympathizing, and longing to save, the allegiance of that child of His had been given. The conditions were perfect : the subject, the offerer, the receiver of the prayer, were one in their purpose and desire to overcome and baffle Satan. There could be no doubt as to the answer to the prayer and the issue of the conflict. From God the necessary renewal to the tried faith must come, and at once Christ's mind flies to the successful conclusion : "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Such a prayer was the expression of Christ's personal mission and power. He would offer it for every man as he is exposed to the sifting of life. It is based upon His power to reveal to men's hearts their relation to God, and God's love to them. Whoever receives those, whoever accepts Christ in that position, has had opened to him a source of strength with which he may defy Satan and the world. This is the Divine natural selection. Men are put here to be tried ; it is a question as to how the ordeal of life will be sustained, but the decision rests with each man. In a struggle, whose intensity constantly dismays us, striving with issues of eternal life and death, he alone will succeed who looks to God for help. In

that search a way of life has been opened that speaks to men with a plainness and directness that belongs to no other voice ; where other things multiply material forces, this one tells of the power of the soul, and of its protection by God. He who hears that voice is the one that will be saved ; he is the one who will have strength to endure all the sifting of life, and to come out of it stronger and better. Give to yourself every other help in life's battle, but do not neglect to seek this greatest one, which concerns a man above all others. You may escape the other dangers of life ; but to be free from the greatest one of life's sifting, this refuge and strength is needed. The health, the wealth, the learning, the cultivation, the friendship, with which you seek to be among the world's successful men and women, and to escape destruction, may do their work, and yet may be the very means of helping on what they are intended to avoid, unless the kernel of the wheat is strong and solid by the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ. That is the conversion which is needed. Men stumble over the word, and wonder what it means ; but is it not clear in the light of our text which contains it, "When once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren" ? It is to turn from all else to the real centre of human life. It is to make wheat wheat, and nothing else ; it is to make

a man a man, and nothing else. It is to exalt that, by reason of which no ordeal, either of life or death, shall ever dismay or overcome him.

We are not alone in this sifting process. This great winnowing life holds men and women and children all alike in its relentless grasp. Our hearts are tried time and time again by little glimpses of the tragedies which are going on in the lives about us. The struggles with poverty, the fight against temptation of young lives which are very close to us in the world, the ordeals which lie before all men and women between the cradle and grave, — those bewilder us with the possibilities of good and evil which they contain. How shall we help these antagonists of evil? They must fight their own battles; no parent, or friend, or benefactor can, by a sheltering arm, draw them out of the struggle: and, if they are wise, they will not do so, any more than Christ would pray that Peter should not be tempted. You may encourage, you may exhort, you may advise; all such help is good, but it is on the surface: and the winnowing process goes on; and, if there is not strength in that kernel of human wheat, it will not be able to stand the ordeal. No revelation from experience as to the secrets of the winnowing machine can save from the effect of its work. And who knows the secret of another's experience? Who can tell

what others have to meet, and pretend to say how they shall do it? Your work, which you long to do for others, must make them strong to do their own work. Through you must flow into them that which shall tell them of real power, able to withstand any ordeal. You will be able to strengthen your brethren when you are converted yourself. Your knowledge of God will give you a sympathy with every brother's trial, and a power to help every brother's soul. Jesus joins His help and Peter's help together. With rarest love and condescension He lifts him up to be a laborer with Himself. His prayer for Peter, doing its work on him, makes him able to do a work for others. Power multiplies itself. There is no reason why every man should not baffle Satan, not only as regards his own soul's salvation, but also as regards that of all to whom his influence flows, and leave him, after all his attempts, a poor, discomfited power of evil, compelled to believe in the existence of a power of goodness which he has all the time been despising. So he failed with Christ in the wilderness, and He who thus resisted became the Captain of our salvation; so, under Him, we who resist, strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, shall help many to the success in life's struggle which is the object and the duty of all men.

IX.

HOPEFULNESS THROUGH CHRIST.

"He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn." — MATTHEW ix. 24.

IN any life of real power, there are unexpected occasions when the real principle of its existence flashes out with startling vividness. Such an occasion is often produced by opposition. The force within feels the obstacle to its manifestation, and has nothing to do but to declare itself, so that all shall really understand what it intends. The sight of an act of cruelty sometimes wrings a cry of pity from some man whose words about kindness have never impressed us half so vividly. It seems to have been so with Jesus in this case. He had, in obedience to the summons of the father, gone to the centurion's house to heal his daughter. On His way He had been hindered by the message that the girl was dead, and therefore that there was no need of His proceeding farther. Putting that obstacle aside by encouraging words to the parent, He had reached the house; and there

the sight and sound of the mourning friends and of the hired minstrels so brought home to Him the hopelessness of all their thoughts and actions that He expresses in the strongest way His own hopefulness. To Him that dead girl was already alive. He felt within Him His own power ; and, defying their scornful laughter, He declares, "She is not dead, but sleepeth."

There is no greater proof of real living power than this ability — nay, this necessity, as it seems to have been here — of declaring itself in the very midst of most opposing circumstances. Weak determination and uncertain power hesitate before an array of contrary opinion ; it doubts its own existence ; it is discouraged and timid as to its own extent. But the true hero, the worker who feels what he can do, rejoices at the emergency ; he leaps forward to meet it, and sees the moment of genuine contradiction as one when no compromises can be allowed, and no doubts harbored. To know just when to give battle, to be able to say to the enemy, "You shall go no farther ; here you must fight," — that is the mark of the great general. And this scene of Jesus' meeting, with His strongest declaration, the utter disbelief of men, is one which, repeated as it was more than once in the Gospels, tells us that He is the truest leader for any man's life. When times are dark-

est, His confidence will show most brightly. This reserve power is always in Christ, because what He does comes from the very being of God. In moments of easy quiet and untempted life we are inclined to doubt its existence, and almost with alarm we look forward to the possibilities of evil that may assail us at any moment. Then the remembrance of this true giant-power, which He had, of asserting Himself when most needed, can be the encouragement to draw closer to His strength, sure that, when the darkest moments come, we shall learn more of Him and of His possibilities than we have ever known before. For men who never know what is before them, for men who know that there is certainly one great mysterious ordeal of death before them, surely that is just the Saviour that is wanted.

But it is the special feature of the contrast which this self-assertion of Christ under opposition brought out, to which we turn our attention. It was hopefulness against hopelessness. The mourning of parents, the wailing of friends, the dirges of hired minstrels, all meant that the girl was dead, and that there was no hope of any thing further. That fact seemed undeniable, and on that supposition they were all doing the best that they could. Only one man thought differently, and at once felt that new action was de-

manded. To Him all was hopeful; there was still life; the mourning and the music must cease, and in the strong prospect of the future the spirit of that house must change. Hope and despair, that battle which rages in every man's breast, and in all the world, was fought out in that house. Jesus was on one side, and all the others, with their traditional views and actions, were on the other. And Jesus conquered.

It is this hopeful side of life on which Jesus is always to be found, and He always has the world against Him. It is not a despairing world; mourning and dirges are not the only sounds that fill the world, as they did that house. But despairing and mournful action is not the only method by which hopelessness expresses itself. That is a feature of the case here, which arises only from the nature of the occasion. But take men's pleasure and their business, and how often the reason given for them has this strain of hopelessness in it! "Let me enjoy myself now," says the young man or woman: "I shall only be young once." The approach of age is not felt; it is not real enough to cause any sorrow or mourning. But there is just that impression, that life is advancing towards something disagreeable, and that affects all action. A man works very hard, and you ask him why, and he says that he must have something to leave to

his children. He knows not what may be in store of trouble and difficulty for him ; he knows not how soon he may die. "Life is short" are the words which nerve many a man, in health as well as in disease. It inspires much of the rush and hurry of life ; and all the tumult about us may be compared to those minstrels making a noise, whose only inspiration was the fact of death. What is the source of our grumbling and our disappointment but the feeling that we are losing some happy moments in a life where they are only too few? We exalt material possessions above the attainment of character. The man who turns his back upon some advantageous opportunity or pursuit, because it would lower his tone of thought, or degrade his standard of action, seems to the world quixotic and dreamy. He evidently has some idea of the future uses and the permanent possession of lofty thought and correct standards of character which the hopelessness of the world does not allow it to appreciate. It sees no place where such character can be used but right here and now ; and, knowing that it will not feed or clothe a man, it says, "Oh, yes, character is good ; but you must not sacrifice too much for it. You want it, but you want something else with it." Hear men's arguments for virtue ! How they harp on expediency, drawing together examples

of successful men, and showing how they have been virtuous, and asking of this world a letter of indorsement for that which ought to be based on eternal principles, and which would live if the world perished to-morrow! In these features our life corresponds to that roomful of mourners and minstrels which Jesus found in the centurion's house. Our tone may be different, our inspiration is the same. And all that is to be changed; it is all to be turned out before He can work. For there is sin in the whole of it. We can all find ourselves guilty there. What right have we to think and act as if life here were every thing? It is thanklessness, it is rebellion, it is waste and destruction, to do that. Many a man is troubled at that sweeping condemnation of all men which the Bible contains, and which is the first, most prominent fact of the Gospel's teaching. He reads, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" and then he turns to his life, and it does not seem to be so bad. Fact by fact he looks at it, and it only seems as if he had done what life demanded at each step. He has compromised a little here, and been a little too persistent for his own desires there; but, on the whole, it does not look like a very bad life. And so he hands the condemnation over to his neighbor, and thinks that it must have been meant for him. But all the time he has overlooked

the limit of his life's purpose, which has affected every single action, and stamped it as guilty. He has come terribly short of the glory of God, — so far short of it that it has slipped entirely out of sight. What right had he to live for this world, when he was made for something infinitely greater? or to believe in success here only, when praise in God's sight was offered him? Disbelief in that future prospect, and hopelessness of any thing beyond what he saw, is the sin which has made each action wrong, and has made all life come short of the glory of God, which he should have been making his own.

You cannot tell where the crooked line begins to deviate from the straight. The more you divide it and subdivide it, the more difficult it is to find its point of divergence. But when the one is seen to have a direct object to which it points in all its parts, and the other is seen to have no such end, then the difference between right and wrong appears. By such a judgment it finds its way to every conscience. Those men and women whom Jesus turned out of that room, that He might work unhindered, they who laughed Him to scorn, were not wicked or light-minded persons: they were there in the interest of all that was respectable and proper. But they were so infected by the hopelessness of all beyond this life, that only as they

went could He work His great work of life. That is the demand for renunciation. In sight of the truth that no soul is made to die, but must live forever, all lower views of life must be put aside, all action which embodies them must be made to cease a while, that this great one may reveal the power which lies latent in every human soul, — the power to live forever by the word of God.

Some of the special features of this story throw still greater light upon this fundamental distinction between Christ and the world.

Notice first the solitude of Jesus in the midst of those men and women. He was the only man who had that great faith so that He could declare it. And how hard it is to be hopeful alone! A gloomy atmosphere depresses a man; the surroundings of mourning break the most courageous spirits. Hopefulness wants to feel itself echoed from other hearts. And the greater the subject on which the man is to be hopeful, the more support he needs. Some little expectation for to-morrow a man may keep in his heart, even though no other one has the same feeling; but to be hopeful over an issue which stretches far into the future, which involves powers that we cannot regulate, and which are mysterious to all men in their working, — that is something which no man dares to attempt. Ask the reason of the way in which a young man

bright in his expectations, and ardent in his feelings, settles down to some smaller view of success than he once allowed himself to entertain, and you will find that it was because, thrown into the association of older men than himself, he found his dreams laughed at, his youthful ideals treated with scorn, as things which they, too, had once known, but had long ago outgrown. He does not at once grant that he is mistaken, and that his visions are mere illusions ; but day by day they become less distinct, until at last they are found to have departed, because there was no place found for them.

We do not see the greatness of Jesus until we see His loneliness ; we do not get His true relation to us, until we see how He led the way, where we are asked to follow. One man alone said, "She is not dead, but sleepeth." There was no peradventure about it, there was not even the softness of expression in saying that she would live. He said that she lived. Nothing but the extremest personal power could use that tone of certainty, of the greatest, most mysterious issue. Because in Himself He felt the power of life which He was to give to her, because He felt the identity of His being, with that stream of life which was in Him, and was to be poured forth into that girl, because He knew what He was, therefore that life was not gone, and she was to be blessed, was as truly asleep as is the

child who only waits for morning light to start into new activity its busy, restless feet and hands. It was what Christ was which made Him able to stand alone ; it was what He was that made Him the leader of the human race. In the world disciples were faithless, in the garden disciples slept, on the cross his friends deserted Him. Let us not be too indignant as we read of those facts. It was the condition of His success that it should be so. It was by that that He showed Himself the Saviour of men, the incarnate Son of God. Had He stood with the support of others, it would have been a very different story. He must go before them ; and more often their desertion meant His greatness above them and all of us, than it did their smallness below us. When men would have reached out for the support of the others, and, feeling no hand, would have drawn back, it was His to say, "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." It was that which put Him in advance of every position which any son of man had ever taken. Separating Him from all others, it placed Him where all others could come up to Him.

We are told to be hopeful ; to live, not as dying men, but as the sons of God, whose privilege it is to have life eternal : and we answer, How can we ? We stand alone ; every event of life, every desire of our souls, seems to laugh at such a claim ; it asks

for sympathy, and it gets none. Then we see the meaning of His life. We are not alone ; He was, but we are not. There are sympathy and support in Him, who led the way into that purity and consecration which is the portion of the sons of God. What He did not have, we have at every step ; and His words say, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." In these days Christ's oneness with us is a very precious truth to the Christian world. Perhaps it never was more fully dwelt upon than it is to-day. But how, just as soon as we grasp it, we feel that it demands only more fully that sense of Christ's greatness above us ! just as the soldier, grasping his sword, wants its hilt fitted to his hand, wants it to be soft to his sensitive flesh ; but he wants to know that it carries a blade of shining, sharp, and hardened steel, to give that hand a power which it can never have of itself.

And then notice, in the next place, that though Christ felt His power, and asserted it only more boldly in the presence of those hopeless men and women, that power could not or did not work until they had all been put forth from the room. It shows us the distinction between two things that we often confuse. Unfavorable circumstances may hinder, but they cannot kill, true power. We despair of God's existence because we do not

see Him accomplishing all His purposes at once. We doubt our own possession of power from God because we are not able to do some work which seems to be demanded of us. We cannot do in one moment what Jesus did, — turn out all adverse influences, — and so we let them tell us that they are all-powerful. The actions of Christ among those men were tokens of all His action everywhere. When He prepared the way for that miracle, quickly as it may have been done, it told the story that His power is never more truly present than when it is preparing the way for its own perfect working. The one moment when He stood there, viewing the mourners, and listening to their wailings, was enough to discourage one who had no clear view of the importance and glory of that work of preparation. It is not so impressive as the work of victory, but it is the one that belongs to us largely here. Why does not the power of God within us do more? If it is Divine, why does it not show more marks of its heavenly origin? This mere defensive work seems very small, but it is very necessary; to believe in it enough to do it well is to be courageous in all life's work. For at one time we have just to say to our souls, "Believe in Christ," in the presence of some question or doubt that we cannot solve; at another it is to say to our souls, "Do God's will,"

though some other path appears more pleasant and profitable. We ask, if it is the path of God, why doesn't it appear pleasant and profitable? Because other things hold the ground. They have to be turned out first by persistent refusal to yield; and to do that is to win more than half the battle. Perhaps that is all we are to do here, just to resist; perhaps we shall go down to our graves without seeing the spiritual miracles accomplished which we have wished for all our lives. Many a worker in a great cause has done that, has been unable to do his great work because the atmosphere was not right, the time had not arrived. But his patient persistence in that struggle made him the great man, and gave to the world the victory for which he longed. Incomplete moral aspirations, unsatisfied spiritual yearnings, seem to make up the possession with which many a man leaves this world; but to have kept his faith through all those discouragements, to have believed that God was working and would conquer, that was the assurance of victory and joy. Looked at thus, Jesus' life-work never got beyond that stage of saying of the world, "It is not dead, but sleepeth." His last word from the world was one of scorn, expressing itself in that act of crucifixion; He did not live to see the dead body of mankind restored to life. Still, that mira-

cle is working itself out ; and only when the last faithlessness of the world shall be turned out, will it be accomplished. But He triumphed as much in that faith in His Father which made Him able to be crucified, as He will in that future reign at that Father's right hand. The one was the pledge of the other. And forever His blessing is upon all-enduring faith.

It is not what we accomplish, but what we persist in for our God, which saves us. "By faith ye are saved." Grant all the distortions that men have made of that grand word, as they will of every good thing in the world : still, when we see its right meaning, we hold to it as one of Christianity's greatest gifts ; for it says, However unfavorable your circumstances, hindering great accomplishments, however hard the battle full of stubborn enemies and hard reverses, however small the gleanings of our poor sterile fields, the faith that fought on the one and worked on the other shall work salvation, and restore to the life of God its Father the soul that was dead in sin. That is a gospel to carry to the discouraged millions of the earth, and by it to nerve them to new effort.

St. Mark tells us, that, after turning out all the other mourners and the minstrels, Jesus took the parents of the child, and entered into the room,

and brought the child to life. Those parents by their presence seemed to form the connection between the faithful Christ and the unbelieving world, for they had a relation to both. Doubtless to them the words of Jesus, "She is not dead, but sleepeth," must have seemed very strange; they could not have meant all to them that they did to Him. And yet their parental love must have fastened on them with a hope which did not allow them to join in the scornful laughter with which others greeted them. They found a response in the deepest feelings of their hearts, which no others there appreciated; and so their presence was no hinderance to that miracle-working power of Christ. And, doubtless, in those wailings a hope kept alive by a parent's love had yearned for something more, and was ready for it when it came. The supernatural in them was ready to be led by the supernatural in Him; for, hopeless and limited as the horizon of human action is, there are feelings of the human heart which are ever whispering words of something more beyond. The feelings of mutual attachment, the bond of family affection, the simple wish for a great one on whom to lean, whose power is far above all that exists here, — those are the things which are ever finding expression in men. Value such bands of life, bind them very

closely, increase them by the life of richest sympathy, for they are priceless. They have no place in human philosophy; there is no explanation of them; they are flowers which have sprung from seeds which have come no one knows whence, and they must be crushed out, says mere worldly wisdom, as intruders. They are considered as weeds, because philosophers can find no use for them. Their beauty shall not protect them: they must go. The fact that they have always had a place of true dignity and power in Christ's teaching is a witness to the truth at once of them and of it.

The divine faith of God saying, "He is not dead, but sleepeth," over a sin-stricken world, finds its counterpart in the faith of a parent in his erring son, whom all the world, and even the brother in the home, doubts and despises. The name of Father in heaven is the one revealed by Christ; and the earthly relation, so often clouded here, finds its warrant and its fulfilment in that fact. When, in order that Christ may do His work, we turn out the sin of life and the faithlessness of the world from its dominion within us, we do not separate ourselves from our human nature. We get at parts of it which nothing else can ever explain or ever assist. We find in ourselves a hope and a power which the whole course of

life has been trying to conceal. It is Christ and His religion that has been the corner-stone of the family ; it is He that has taught self-sacrificing labor for our fellow-men ; it is He that has encouraged the growth of charity the world over ; it is His name that has become the synonyme for all that is sweet and lovely. Because He inspired an everlasting hope, therefore at His word sprung into new being every institution of life and every feeling of the human heart which looks to the result of patient, loving working for its vindication.

Fortunes are made in a day, and in a day they perish ; material results must be readily acquired, for the time is short in which they are to be enjoyed. Charity suffereth long, because it liveth long. The love of parents and children, brother and sister, friend and friend, groweth day by day, never is hurried, must not be forced, for it has time enough : it is to last forever. The warrant of that faith, which none of us can spare from life, is in those words of Christ to every soul, " You are to live forever." When you hear that truth from His lips, and live by it, then you give the word of encouragement to all that is best and most lasting in life. It is by no chance that moments when our deepest feelings and attachments are stirred by either sorrow or joy are often full of the richest

religious experiences and expressions. It is the flower turning toward the sun. We have no right to mistrust such leadings, and to make disparaging remarks about them. It is the parents entering with Christ into the room where His Divine love performs its wonderful acts.

There is one more feature of this miracle which ought to be remarked upon, because it helps to illustrate still farther Jesus' relation to others in the performance of it. After the girl was restored to health, Jesus ordered to give her meat. It is often said that this is a proof of Christ's moderation and reason in the use of His miraculous powers. Where an object could be accomplished by other methods, He worked no miracle. He who raised from the dead, gave no miraculous supply of food. The lesson goes still farther, as it shows how the miraculous power goes on, after its first exhibition, to affect all other methods of work. They who before mourned her as dead, were now to give her food as living. Jesus had conquered those who laughed Him to scorn; and now those who, by their faithlessness, seemed to shut the poor girl away from life, were, because His power had intervened, to do all in their power to help her life. She was to walk through the world, meeting friends who once had mourned her, demanding and obtaining the tribute of their

friendship in a better and richer way. So Jesus changes the world from a hopeless to a hopeful place. These things about us do injure, and degrade, and treat us as if we were dead very often. They seem to be masters; and we cry out, "How can we resist?" We fight with each in detail, and so are conquered. But when by one assertion of power we put ourselves in Christ's hands, and by His power walk out among them as living souls, they give us the bread of our daily life for God. This is God's world in which we are living; and if we only tell it so by being God's children, and claim it for our Father, it is willing enough to help us. We turn it out as master, that we may take it back as servant; we turn out the world, not because we do not want it, but that we may gain its true assistance. And, after all, it is a very kind, good-natured world, ready to serve us; and when we grumble at it, it is generally ourselves with whom we are finding fault. "Can I live under such a temptation?" says some man or woman surrounded by circumstances adverse to a holy life. Not until you have heard God's words, "I say unto thee, arise." When you have done that, then look at your tempted life, and you will find that it gains new strength every day, just as the ship, sound and firm, springs forward to its desired port under the breeze that will strain at

every seam the poor shattered hull, until it has sent it to the bottom of the sea.

So Christ and His work are related to the world and its work. We are too easily discouraged. There is a supernatural power in this Saviour of ours. We ought to believe in Him more thoroughly; to summon Him to help every best thing within us, which, heaven-born, is only too strange in this world of ours; to bring under our control every earth-born thing, which, made to serve, is lording it over us. This is the hope and power of the Gospel against the despair and weakness of mere human life. On which side are we? On the side of that scornful, faithless company, or on the side of the faithful, powerful Master? Life hangs on the answer to that question.

X.

JESUS' LIMITATIONS, HIS POWER, AND GLORY.

"For if He were on earth, He should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law." — HEBREWS viii. 4.

THE elevation of Jesus to His proper place among men is the object of all Christianity, and is the method by which it would overcome the sin of the world, and bring men back to God. In producing such an estimate of Jesus, all the facts of His character and position are equally important, — those relating to His humiliation as well as to His glory ; those which show His limitations as well as His greatness. The omission of one of them on either side would detract from the perfect understanding of Christ, and so far injure the full representation of Him. In this text, the fact which the writer of the Epistle cites bears witness to the truth that there will be earthly aspects of limitation to the character of Christ, and tells us how they are to be looked at, so as to lead to His ultimate elevation. Writing for those who were acquainted

with the ritual of the Jewish temple, he points out the fact that the One on whom all the hope of Christians was fixed as the fulfiller of that ritual was Himself unable, under its regulations, to offer a single sacrifice. He never could fill that place, which was at the head of the nation, of greatest influence and of largest authority. He came of a tribe which had no sacerdotal position; and therefore, as the priest offering in the temple, none of His most ardent followers would ever have been able to see Him, no matter how long He had lived, or how much influence He had gained.

This fact, which was so striking to a Jew, and which must have been a stumbling-block to many a devoted soul, has been reproduced over and over again, — we may say is a constant fact. Jesus is always falling short of men's ideal. There arose the ideal of the ascetic: that was the holiest, the best, the noblest life, to men's minds; and that man whose life was open to all the influences of His fellow-men, that man who was reproached by the malicious distortions of enemies as a gluttonous man and a winebibber, could no more fit that character than He could that of the sacrificing priest of the ancient temple. The time of chivalry and of crusades exalted the warrior; and He who sent forth His disciples without sword, and healed the ear of Malchus, was no figure to vie

with the bold knights in their valorous reputations, any more than the plain garments of the humble Galilean could shine beside the imposing vestments of Jewish priests. Or, come down to modern days, and take the standards of any class in life to-day. The scientific thinker asks for facts, for analysis, for knowledge of the structure of earth and heaven: and those beautiful parables and wonderful miracles enter into no such detail; and Jesus in a scientific assembly to-day would be as completely out of place as He would have been beside the high priest in the Holy of Holies. And the business, the commercial, ideal of life, does not look for its leader to Him who said, "Lend, hoping for nothing again," and "Take no thought for the morrow," any more than priest and Levite consulted Christ as to the best mode of offering sacrifices. Politics and society would find it equally impossible to discover their ideal in Him who originated no new system of government, and associated always with the lowly. The words of Isaiah's prophecy have a real meaning: "And when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." All this causes difficulty. Men are listening for the word that shall help them in their lives; and, when they do not hear it in their religion, they will look for it elsewhere: and so men will be more attached to their newspæ-

pers than to their Bibles. How quickly churches could be filled if some great authority as to the making of money was expounded, Sunday after Sunday! Men, too, who have had their eyes fastened on a certain ideal, find it hard to respond to the greatness of one who is deficient in that particular direction, just as men who had looked with respect on priest and king found it hard to acknowledge the greatness of Him, who came without the crown of either the temple or the palace.

We need not inveigh against the earnestness of pursuits which have erected such ideals, any more than this writer found it necessary to heap reproaches on the Jewish system of priesthood because it found no place for Christ within it. Would Jesus lead the life of the modern clergyman to-day? is the taunt which, from the outside, may be thrown at the preaching of His Gospel. Better than to answer it by asking whether He would find it possible to lead the life of the modern merchant or statesman or scholar, better is it for all of us to recognize that He would lead the life of no one of us. It is easy to make such contrasts, but there is one great truth behind them: no forms or modes of action, which we find it necessary to observe, could hold the power of that Divine life, any more than the life of an ordinary Jewish priest, God-ordained as he was, could be

the measure of the life of a Saviour of the world.

And as we say that, we reach the ground of the solution which is given to this difficulty. Jesus was not a priest of the old covenant, because He was the Mediator of a new and better covenant; He was not a priest in descent from Aaron, because He was a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. The limitations of Jesus are His glory; the fact that He does not claim any of these ideals of earthly greatness is because He sets up a greater ideal, to which they all belong. We can find an illustration in our human life. A king steps down among his people; he mingles with them, and sees them at their work. And there is not one of those workmen that cannot do something better than he can. If they should bring their difficulties of work to him, he could not answer one of them; he fulfils the ideal of no one of their positions. And yet all those interests are his, and are strong and healthy through his power and character. His kingly character remains untouched by the superiority of any one of those who are eminent in their departments, and the carelessness or scorn of some man who thinks a man no king who does not know his secrets, never moves his mien of royal dignity. The lifting-up of every one of those subjects to the higher

conception of the nation over which he rules, is a work truly his, as no mechanical knowledge or minute practice can ever be. Such was Christ's position as king; and so He stands far above, though never apart from, every standard of human attainment. He helps every one of them, as He brings them all into connection with the very centre of life. He set forth forever the truth, that the life of the lower is to be found in the higher.

That was what the world needed, and what no other one could teach. Many a man is nobler and better in his business for the influence of the wife who never enters his place of business, and knows none of its secrets. True influence knows none of our limits, because it is dependent on something infinitely greater, and that Christ revealed. Our deepest knowledge of the Jewish priesthood to-day, our attraction to all that ritual, is on account of Him who never could minister at its altars. What achievement of self-sacrifice or of warlike valor has not gained inspiration from Him whose whole life told of the power of standing up for principle against all enemies, and exalting inward conviction against outward forces? And to-day knowledge is strong and pure for His influence who made men respect the world in which they lived, and taught the duty of honest inquiry and manly thought; business feels the im-

pulse of the honesty and prudence and strength of His teaching, who revealed the true relation between man and man, which controls all our intercourse ; and whatever virtue dignifies the statesman, and whatever grace clothes the man or woman of society, finds its truest inspiration and illustration in Him.

Jesus showed that great central truth of the sonship of God, of which all our activities are illustrations. He carried none of them to their proper end : He left that for His members. And as they do that with all their individual eagerness and industry, they are but carrying out His work. His teaching by illustrations was no accident. It was the setting-forth of that truth, that all the developments of life are the opening of the truth of Him who is the life of the world. There is no other possibility of Christ as the revelation of God but this one. The omnipotence of God reaching to every minutest corner of the earth, able to take up in that mighty hand, and carry with perfect ease, the burdens at which we men toil so long, — that would have frightened us, and seemed to dismiss us as useless in the world ; but this revelation of God, telling the greatness of what we did, but never marring its dignity in our minds, — this one draws us forth to sweetest labor under Him who gives it to us.

There is one direction in which the superiority of Jesus has always been acknowledged, and that is in moral life. There no teacher, no master, has ever surpassed Him ; and all men have said that He understood the laws of practical life, and could apply them with a certainty and decision which belonged to no other. Others, in philosophical speculations on morals, have attempted more than His words ever contained ; others have surpassed Him in tracing the historical development of morals : but in practical application of morality, none have ever been so successful. We follow with dreary resignation the definition of duties in Eastern codes of laws and Western disquisitions on life, and then turn to the Lord Jesus, and find some short word of His outweighing them all.

But this granting of the region of moral life to Jesus carries out very fully all that we have seen about His relation to all life. For that department is precisely the one which suffers under the influence of zeal and mastery in the ordinary business of life. That which is the interest of all, belongs to no one. The business-man says, "I cannot be too particular about morals, and succeed in life ;" the politician calls high-flown and impracticable the zeal which protests against all corruption and bribery ; literature and art say that considerations of morals must be put aside, and

art must be pursued for art's sake ; society allows customs and forms which its members cannot approve, but which they say are necessary. All of us find ourselves compromising conduct for the sake of success. Can we not say of Christ that the very thing which would prevent His being a priest in many of our modern temples, which would keep Him from being the successful man among us, would be that pure life, that consecration to a higher standard of living, which distinguishes Him from all others ?

The fact, then, that this life, which devoted itself to no one pursuit, but called all pursuits up into the higher one of being sons of God, that this life exalted that theoretically important, but practically slighted department of moral life, is wonderfully suggestive. It tells us that he who follows that life will find himself in the same moral atmosphere. Low and compromised moral life comes from narrow views ; from fixing our minds on some immediate object, and making that the measure of all our existence. He who sees such an object only as a part of something greater is the man who will cease sacrificing nobleness of character and purity of life, which are treasures that will last to eternity, for ends that must be limited and transient. Is not that precisely the kind of assistance which we need ? We men must be priests in our own tem-

ples, and we are made to aspire to the highest places in the regions of life where God has placed us. That earnestness, as it limits our sight, may be destroying our character and hope of eternal life. We plead as our excuse that we are doing our best, and cannot be expected to see the full Divine meaning of all our work. But when that is showed to us, when, through such a life as that of Jesus, we see that our little pursuit is not the end of our being, then with that revelation goodness stands forth as a real power in life, and we hold to it in spite of every sacrifice for which it may call, in the name and spirit of Him who has thus consecrated it for us. Our pursuit shall still be vigorous and successful ; but, by connection with Him, character, too, shall be purified and elevated by it.

That is one advantage of Christ's position outside of our special pursuits. We find another in the way in which it draws us all together. He is for all, because no special pursuit causes Him to belong specially to any. Jesus as the perfect Jewish priest would have had but slight chance of influence on our times, when priest and temple have disappeared ; and equally so, Jesus the specially successful man in any direction would have ever seemed to be a special power and help for one class of men, however broad His culture, or large His sympathy. The secret of His life would have

admitted of easier attainment to those who approached it from the side of that special knowledge and preparation. But now He is for all; none can specially claim him, and all are drawn together in Him. One complains that it is useless to ask him on one day in seven to dismiss his pursuits of the other six from his mind, and to join in the worship and thought of Christian service. It seems too far away from him, and his thoughts fly back to their old haunts of the week past. Is not the fact that they do so, greater proof of the need of the influence of Jesus, that this narrowing process may cease? Is not the way that Christian worship calls us all thus together, men, women, and children, without distinction, a part of Christ's greatest blessing in telling us of our manhood which is beneath all our pursuits and greater than them all? We all come from our different pursuits; but it is the same tale of mingled joy and sorrow, success and discouragement, struggle and triumph, sin and holiness, which we bring. It is the same word of love, forgiveness, hope, and strength that we want to hear. The bands of life are strengthened in the presence of Him who belongs to us all. We feel the influence in deepened friendship, widened sympathy, enriched family feeling. It will be harder for our variety of pursuits to separate us when in truth we recog-

nize our relation to Him who is the common Lord and Saviour of us all. We cannot afford to ask or to follow a narrower religion, when we in the limits of one day are put under so many varied demands from life about us. The very men and women by our side call upon us to live by the power of Him who, putting aside all human greatness, made Himself the Lord and Master of us all.

The older we become, the harder it is to become Christians. We have such well-defined lives ; our ideas are crystallized, our prejudices are hardened, our pursuits are fixed. Every day we meet men of different cast, and turn from them to pursue our own lives, perfectly sure that ours are best for us. Then this demand of Christ, that we should give ourselves to Him, meets us ; and we give it the same reception, and go on our way satisfied with ourselves. But, in the light of our truth to-day, the call of Christ cannot be treated so. It is not like any other. We are refusing, not another life, but life itself ; we are turning, not from another pursuit, but from the power of all true pursuit. Against other men a man may claim his right and be strong : but here " he that loseth his life shall find it ; " he that looks beyond that which distinguishes him from others shall find that which binds him to God. The child, before life has exalted one type and mode of action, finds the

belief in the great God, and the faith in the loving Jesus, the most natural thing to his mind. They embrace all things, and are well adapted to that universal interest and confiding sympathy which is childhood's happy possession. It is a blessed gift to us that in this kingdom of heaven, where Christ reigns, we can still — nay, we must still — be children. We are asked to put ourselves aside, to cast away that which comes from our sinful desires and narrower pursuits, and to enter into relation with Him who is large enough to embrace all men, because He is the Son of God. Ought not manhood, so eager, so self-assertive, so powerful in its contact with its fellow-men, to thank God for that which thus helps it, while laboring hard in its own chosen line, to retain the breadth of life and thought which can come from God alone, which makes life's pursuits not a lowering and destroying, but an elevating and saving process?

For these earthly pursuits and professions of ours change and pass away. We pass that time of manhood, and a second childhood comes. The definiteness of pursuit again fades, and the temples at whose altars we have ministered know us no longer. And then the true power of Him by whom we have lived those lives will carry us forward to new work, and never let us feel that life

is exhausted or wasted. As the priesthood of the Jewish temple passed by the power of Christ into that better and higher priesthood of the Christian believer, so life's training, narrow and technical as it may have seemed at times to be, by the power of Christ shall prepare us for the larger and better work in which we are to serve Him forever.

XI.

OUR DAILY BREAD.

"Give us day by day our daily bread." — LUKE xi. 3.

IF we take the Lord's Prayer as it was given us by Christ, every one of its petitions must be looked at in its connection, in order that it may give us its full meaning. Here this petition for something which every man appreciates and every man desires, bread, is placed after the petitions for the glory of God's name, the progress of His kingdom, and the performance of His will, which are not commonly objects of deep interest among men. When we have offered those, then we can really pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." For we want confidence that God desires that we should have bread; we want to know that He is interested in the matter. We appreciate its importance, but does He? Until we have some assurance that He does, we cannot pray the prayer except as a mere form; and therefore we are told to offer those other petitions first, that we may have some idea of our right relation

to God. When we know that we are as much interested in the glory of God's name as He is Himself, when we appreciate our position as a part of His kingdom, when His will is felt as containing all that is good and desirable in every one of the creatures that His willing hand has made, then no want is distant from His heart. It may be way out on the circumference of His action: but He, sitting at the centre, feels it in all its intensity; and we, however distant we may be, know where to look for interest, sympathy, and comfort.

Here, in its restoring to man of this sense of his connection with God, is the glory of religion. This is the work that it does for our common life; to give this sense of reality of connection with God, is to make the man as confident as the birds. "Are ye not much better than they?" Why, then, are you fretful and anxious, and they calm and confident? Because they have never lost their sense of connection with God, as far as it was given them: you have. Sin, worldliness, the reality of things around you, the vagueness of your Father's love, are not allowing you to know the power and love of God as yours, as they were meant to be. They are lost, and dropped out of sight. Let them once be restored, and the care for daily bread does not vanish; it

becomes deeper than ever : you see it now as a thing resting on God's heart and mind as much as on your own. The care for daily bread, the constant strain of earthly anxieties, are not God's ground of finding fault with you. He gave you every one of the cares ; they are absolutely necessary, and they are holy because His mark is upon them. But the power to see them in no higher light is what constitutes guilt. The heavy black weights of a clock are necessary to make the hands on the dial move, and speak to all that see them of the order of God's universe, of the value of time, of the steady progress of life. When a man values the lessons of that dial, when he is one who wants to be systematic, profitable, and earnest, then he never neglects those weights : he winds them up as they have run down ; he keeps them in order ; he values them as he thinks of them working by night and day for his eternal interests. There you have the picture of God's care for the bodily wants of a man because he is His child, and the conscientious and religious man's care for his bodily interests, dark, dull, dreary weights as they may seem to be sometimes, because of the soul which they help in its course and service for God. Turn round the picture, imagine a man in his foolishness painting and adorning those weights, constantly looking at

them, valuing the face of the clock because its moving hands show that the weights are moving, and are doing their work, and are in good condition, and you have the man who values religion and all the higher motives of life only as far as they make him more comfortable and more easy. Yes, there is a connection between religion and life; but in order to see what God means it to be, we must understand it as a connection wherein religion has the mastery, and gives the rest of life importance. Otherwise, the religion will soon lose its vitality, just as the man will not value the face of the clock long when it simply speaks of the weights; he will take the motion of the weights alone, and be satisfied with that. The man will take his bread without praying for it, eat it without looking up to God, and will let this petition die from his lips. And so, as we utter it, it is a prayer that God will give us a true idea of the relation of all the interests of our life to Him; will let us feel that there is good and deep reason which can never be shaken, since it is founded in His nature and ours, why He and we should care for every slightest interest and want which any of His creatures may feel.

The prayer is for bread alone, and therefore most of us would be disappointed if it were

answered literally, and would think that life could not go on with such slight provision. And yet, I think we want to retain the word, though the word rendered "bread" had probably come to have the wider meaning of "provisions" when it was used in the Lord's Prayer. For there is surely something very significant in our prayer for this one thing, which the world has always wanted in all places and at all times, the want for which has been supplied in so many ways, and has called upon the activity of so large a proportion of each generation. We feel that no other word could speak to us so strongly, not only of our desires, but of those desires as the gift of God; no other word could limit our prayer, as it should be limited, to legitimate wants; and no other word could extend our petition so widely to every want that is legitimate. The same desire within us may clamor at one time for satisfaction that we may do good, and perform our duty, and at another for purposes of crime or selfish gratification; at one time it comes laden with a command and approval from God, at another time it is prompted by men's influence or our own passions; at one time it is bread, at another it is poison. God alone can know and understand and discriminate between these desires of ours, and we need to be pro-

tected against ourselves ; and therefore we pray, "Give us this day our daily *bread*."

Or, take another difficulty in life. How often there seems a strange, irreconcilable fight within us between the need of simplicity and the demands of more complex and cultivated lives ! We cannot go backward, and yet it seems almost as if we were manufacturing desires which crowd God's original nature out of sight. But that nature is His in its development, as much as it is in its first promptings ; both in the race and in the individual it is His in its manhood as well as its childhood. Only feel that His will is the true one ; let life be under His guidance ; struggle against the mere desires of selfishness and ease ; value every new acquirement that makes you more efficient for God ; dread every thing that makes you cowardly, every refinement that interferes with the honest simplicity of your soul in God's work, and makes you afraid of man and man's standards. All legitimate wants that belong to the development of our God-given nature are included in that word "*bread*." Pray, "Give us this day our daily *bread*." Feed the want that came from Thee ; starve the rest of my demands." And, praying that prayer, in the same spirit you will regulate your life rightly, and be wise in your selection of the cultivating, refining, and educat-

ing forces which are to bring out of your nature the possibilities and desires that God Himself has implanted there. We know the difference between true and false cultivation. The artificial manners, the touchy jealousy about one's rights, the nervous anxiety as to men's opinions of the latter, all contrast only too strongly with the open simplicity, the confident magnanimity, the calm self-possession, of the true man and woman. It is only the reflection of a difference in God's sight between the man who has cultivated himself by manufacturing or following lower and earthly standards, and him who has gone on, led and fed by a heavenly Father, who never fails to develop want after want in this rich nature of ours, and has always the appropriate supply for each.

And then, all men want bread, and none can live without it. The student and the laboring-man, the millionaire and the beggar, have one dish in common ; bread is a fuel for every human fire, whether it burn high or low, from the watch-fire on the mountain to the hidden fire on one poor family hearth. And since under that head come all our earthly and bodily desires, as wants created by God, they cease to divide us from other men. We see their wants, too, higher and lower than ours, coming from God ; and that fact is far more important than differences. We

cease to envy, cease to be proud. The unity of the heart that sends and the hand that supplies is felt in all our relations. We feel that God, if He will, can bring us up to the wants of others; He can bring others up to us. He made us to differ; He has infinite resources, He has infinite time. Wants are made, wants are satisfied, by Him. That fact, contained in that one word "bread," throws us back on His wisdom, as we all of us, children of one common family, meet around the table of our Father who art in heaven, and pray, "Give us day by day our daily bread." Pray it as a prayer against contention and strife, and it will be a universal blessing.

Does God give us our bread? Is it not a thing that we ought to work for, and not to pray for, unless we really desire to see manna come down out of the heavens again. Bread and earthly blessings generally represent to us human energy, wisdom, and prudence; and it will be a great loss to the world when they cease to do so. But so much the more reason is there that we should pray for bread; for then our prayer really approaches God as He is,—a God working through secondary causes in His management of the earthly interests of men. Those first petitions of the Lord's Prayer are prayers that a man's soul can appreciate, and to that soul God can and does

speak directly. But leave those to stand alone, and we see God as of necessity one who does work at first hand ; and that, He is not, and cannot be. It does not add to God's glory to think of Him as such a one. That throne of His, toward which we look up and pray with all our hearts, "Thy kingdom come," would not be more powerful or more kindly if it were where every commonest hand could touch it. That name of His, which lies close to our secret thoughts, would not be more hallowed if He walked among us, giving us our bread with His own hand. It is more wonderful to think of Him as bringing food to generation after generation through so many various and appropriate channels. It is kinder to think of Him as one who stimulates His children, respecting their powers ; showing Himself in a thousand different ways, rather than by bringing supplies in one evident, open way. Bread-fruit growing on the trees does not tend to the development of devotional or religious men. The countries in which you find the one, do not show you the best specimens of the other. The inhabitants of those tropical lands look up just high enough to see the tree, and are satisfied. But bread brought from the earth by hard labor, eaten in the sweat of the brow, makes the man rise and praise God with all his developed faculties, and say,

“Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself,” and all the more wonderful because of that.

A man comes and says to you, “Give me bread.” It is the easiest way to give him the price of a loaf : it is harder, it is wiser, it is kinder, to find him work, to stimulate his energy, to encourage his flagging spirits, to procure friends for him. Sometimes he is passing through an intermediate wilderness, where he needs a little manna rained down for a time ; and you are to imitate your God in doing it. But that is not the rule of working ; nor is it God’s. And yet, when you had thus set a man ^{*}upon his feet, you would not for a moment think that you had not answered his cry for bread, or did not deserve his thanks. You would expect them all the more, and they would be more valuable as they came from the lips of an independent man, instead of from the parrot-like phrases of a pauperized human being.

So we pray, and the best answer God can give is to make us men. We see its answer in every friend, in every strong thought, virtuous resolution, and energetic impulse. We learn to acknowledge Him everywhere. We trace Him from our table to the sunbeam that on some distant prairies ripened the wheat. He is diffused in all places. He is a God of wonderful resources. He is our God, meeting us at every point, speaking to us of

the greatness and happiness of life. The prayer makes us respect ourselves, as we see God thus ready to mingle His power with ours, and to work with us everywhere. Give us *our* bread, not *Thine*. Let it be ours. It comes from God; our prayer shows that: and therefore, when prayer has established that relation strongly, we need not be afraid to give that possessive pronoun all its force. Human possessorship is dangerous only when no such prayer is offered. Let the gifts come marked with your own name, speaking of personal responsibility, of personal duty, and God will become glorified more than ever. *Our* bread, not *mine*. You do not, you must not, want your neighbor's bread; you must want him to have that. Where is there a chance for dishonesty, where for oppression, when we pray such a prayer as that? No grinding the face of the poor, no withholding their wages, no reliance on their helplessness, when we have prayed that God would give them *their* bread. It is theirs, God gave it them; and we are to see that our hand never keeps back the blessing for which we pray. In the ever-recurring crusade against property, in the constantly renewed conflict between classes, upon what basis can we meet which will stand more firmly than the simple prayer from all classes of men, "Give us this day our daily bread"? It is a prayer that we may

love our work, appreciate our duty, assist the poor, and respect our neighbor ; it is a prayer for earnestness, and a prayer for justice ; it is a prayer which, asking for bread, asks God to guide and inspire all these activities and relations which the ever-present and universal search for bread involves.

There is another expression in the prayer which we must not overlook. In Matthew it reads, "Give us *this day* our daily bread ;" in Luke, "Give us *day by day* our daily bread." In both, therefore, is that distributive idea of allotting to each day the proper character and quantity of its bread. For how the days do differ ! At one time it is the diminution of supply that is wanted, to abate our pride, to increase our sense of dependence, to chasten and soften us ; at another only a full table and prosperity can give us strength and encouragement. We labor on the same, day after day, trying to get all we can, the best and the most. We know not how to regulate our own lives : we are beyond ourselves. Our lives are too delicate for our hands to manage, and so we leave it to God. We can do nothing else, for we cannot see either the poverty or the fever of our blood. Unrequited labor is no contradiction, therefore ; unexpected and apparently cruel disappointment is not to seem unaccountable. Neither of them is to make us say, "I will

not labor or I will not enjoy and be happy again." It is right for us to keep the stream of human life full of activity and work. Only He who presides over us, "our Father," knows when and where that flood shall be brought to bear on the machinery of life, so that it shall either produce the greatest results, or just let us have enough, perhaps scarcely enough, to live on. In our earliest, simplest prayer we embody this trust, which it is the work of all life to learn perfectly. We would not leave it out, as we see on every side men making shipwreck of themselves because they think that they know and understand all the wants of their own life. We can only determine to say and use it more constantly, to remember it under disappointment, to rejoice in it in prosperity, to feel sure that the Father alone can feed us with food convenient for us.

Surely we have seen that this prayer covers range enough to make those who pray it ask for some assurance that it can be fulfilled. Touching all our wants, our growth, our relation to others, our sense of trust and confidence, it is not a prayer that can be offered to any one who may chance to be near us. We want one who has power and sympathy and knowledge; one who is in heaven, out of which come our supplies of life; one who is on earth, where here we earn and eat our bread.

How do we know our Father to be such a one? The other petitions go up to Him without incongruity, but for this one we hesitate whether it is fit for His ear. Now, with this need, that name, "Bread of Life," which Christ claimed for Himself, has a new meaning. It is a very rich figure. "The bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." That is the true bread. It is no manna dropping every morning: it is better than that. It is always present. It is the love of God to stimulate us; to tell us that God never forgets us; to remind us of our own importance, and of that of our brother; to make us confident that God will make all things work together for good to them that love Him.

Christ is thus the incentive to a true life. He is on the earth among men, where He came to live, and so He is the one who can be indeed the "Bread of Life." Most of us are not starving; but most of us are troubled, nervous, hurried, in this earthly work of life. Is it not salvation indeed to be told thus of the love of God, who has sent His Son, that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"? It is the calm, quiet, joyful workers that succeed in the world. You cannot separate the external and the internal in life, and therefore you cannot sepa-

rate Christ and our daily bread. The catechism phrase is, "I desire that God will send us all things that are needful both for our souls and bodies." God's gift to a world calling for bread is not a stone, no dead gift, but the presence of His Son. By that He strengthens us ; we take up the old work stronger and better, and our prayer for daily bread is answered every day. Every piece of bread, every blessing of life, speaks of our Saviour. Every emergency, all the steady work of life, tell of His readiness to save. This is a Christian prayer ; it was dictated by Christ. It is never uttered rightly without Him. Say it at the entrance of each day's work, and then go forth to live in the power and name and love of that Saviour by whom we are assured of its perpetual answer. No life relying on Him shall ever fail : it shall be fed by God itself ; it shall be kept and guided by a closer and better love than even that without which a sparrow doth not fall to the ground.

XII.

GIFT AND PURCHASE.

"But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money."

— ACTS viii. 20.

THE interview between Peter and Simon Magus, of the account of which our text is a part, gave rise to a word which was much more commonly heard in the Church once than it is now. Simony came to mean, in the Church, the buying and selling of positions, which involved spiritual duties and privileges. Such traffic in the power to confer the Holy Ghost is something which, ever since the times of the Reformation, the spirit of the Church has learned to look upon with the greatest horror and dread. The enormities and outrages which arose from it are difficult to find in any branch of the Church to-day, and the word, therefore, has retired into the obscurity of history. But is the thing dead? and are we ready yet to forget the story and the interview on which that word was based? While human nature remains the same, may we not be sure that the danger still

remains, and that the warning is still needed? See how general in its terms is Peter's charge. It is not that Simon wanted a position in the rising Church; he does not specify the fact that he desired to purchase the power of calling down the Holy Ghost. Those features are lost sight of in the larger charge, that he thought to purchase a gift from God.

We to-day, in the enlargement of life which Christianity has produced, look on many things as the gift of God. The desires of men do not turn, as they did once, to Church positions or ministerial functions. If they did, there would not be the constant lament over the deficiency in the supply of young men who are offering themselves for God's work as ministers in His Church. Other paths of life are ever opening as means of blessing to the world; other positions are sought as conveying influence and power. With this enlarged range of desire, the sin of Simon becomes also enlarged beyond what it was in the Middle Ages, when places in the Church were so valuable. Wherever money is looked upon as the means of obtaining any of God's gifts, wherever to it is ascribed a power to compel God, directly or indirectly, there simony will exist. Surely, then, in a time when the power of money is dwelt upon as it never was before, when, by the possibilities of

control and combination which it displays, it sometimes attracts and again frightens us, when it is alternately fascinating and overwhelming, — surely such a time is the very one when more than ever we need to understand the curse upon its misuse which Peter uttered long ago. These are not the times which can spare this verse for any dead historical issue.

As we read over Peter's words, their very sound brings out the nature of the sin, for their terms express the contradiction that is involved in all misuse of money. To purchase a gift is evidently impossible. One of the two words must be wrong. Either the thing is not a gift, or else we have not purchased it. Is the world, is our life, a gift, or is it a purchase? Between those two ideas we are forever vacillating. Our belief in God says that it is a gift : our lives of activity and energy say it is a purchase. We talk of providence, and then are discouraged at our misfortunes or our failures, as if we had never heard of such a thing as God's providence. We pray for all blessings, temporal and spiritual, and then congratulate ourselves when we have put ourselves into a position to obtain them.

Now, into these lives, forever tossed between these two ideas, enters the element of money. Its one reason of existence is purchase. We cannot

eat it and cannot wear it ; the man who hoards it for the mere pleasure of looking at it is acknowledged to be a pitiable fool. Can we not see how at once this universal thing, so necessary and so much desired, throws all its weight on the side of purchase in our view of life? It makes it one continual barter. From hand to hand the precious possession passes ; it is never out of sight long ; it sings its monotonous song of purchase in every place. What wonder that it soon seems to tell the whole story of life, and to sum up all our relations as men. See how the man without money begins to look on life entirely from the other side, of gift. He rings at your door, and, with his face hardened to asking, tells you that you ought to help him. He reads you a lecture on your charity and your modes of giving : it is a subject with which he is well acquainted. He lives in order to receive gifts ; the world owes him a living, why should he purchase it with his work ? The same man, suddenly made rich, often knows not how to use his money ; either by lavishness or by squandering he wastes it, because by long disuse all the laws of careful purchase as the basis of human action have become obsolete in his mind.

Purchase is a necessary element of life, and money represents it. It is needed for our independence ; without it we sink down into gift-

receivers from our fellow-men. The strong, self-reliant character that belongs to men of business comes entirely from their holding so natural a relation to their fellow-men; they receive what they pay for, they expect to be paid for what they give. That is the simple law of honest trade, and it is the law of honest manhood, and woe to the man who attempts to avoid it, whether it be by begging or by gambling. The very money which he receives is a rebuke to him, as it tells him of the universal existence of that law of purchase between man and man, which, like all other laws, will punish the man who violates it. Money is man's contrivance for his purposes, for convenience in obeying the law of his human connection. The very stamp on it says, "Render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's."

But when money, with the principle which it represents, begins to enter into our relation to God, then the contradiction comes, and the sin with it. Just as living on men's gifts spoils our true relation to them, so trying to purchase of God spoils entirely the true sense of our relation to Him. God must give: that fact is written in our belief of Him as our Creator, our great superior, infinitely above us. It is the fact that is repeated in the tone of authority that fills every revelation of Him; it is the thought of every heart that

cares to look for Him in the earth around us. There is no God if we can purchase things of Him. Money is utterly atheistic in its very central principle when it is taken out of its proper place; and, as men heap it up, we have only the repetition of the old-storied struggle of the giants who heaped mountain upon mountain, all of which were so good in their places on earth, that they might reach to heaven, and unseat God from His throne. As money grows in power and influence, this will be its destructive power upon men's lives. You need not wait for the debased indulgence that comes with acquired luxury: the danger is in the first dollar that is earned. Beware of it; it meets all men—yes, and women too—as they pass out of childhood's state of gift-receiving into manhood's time of purchase. There is nothing with which to meet it but the simple knowledge of God cultivated by every means which is thrown about us, and by every spiritual influence which can be brought to bear upon us. The relation to God must be learned more and more closely in all its special features. The thought and the effort must be fixed directly on Him by morals, by religion, by worship, by study, by prayer. No new view of relations to men can take its place, for it is just those which the fact of money is forever exaggerating and distorting.

Which of God's gifts did money ever purchase? I need not repeat the commonplaces as to men's disappointments in the possession of wealth, for surely we know that on that never yet hinged the life, the health, the happiness, or the success of a man. We have all learned, that, as money removes one set of dangers from life, it immediately creates others: as it allows greater attention to sanitary conditions, it also conduces to luxury and over-indulgence; as it makes intercourse between men easier, it makes it more selfish and frivolous; as it adds the means of success, it reduces the motive for struggle. What is the meaning of this? Is it not that money can purchase human conditions, can do its work in its own sphere: it cannot do it beyond that sphere; it cannot purchase God's gifts. It is the voice of experience echoing that of religion, "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth;" and "All souls are mine," says God: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."

And this is a truth which not only those who possess money, but all men, must learn. Peter's condemnation is of those who *think* that the gift of God can be purchased with money. He who stands at a greater or less distance from wealth, envying those who have it, feeling as if they had every thing that is good, never recognizing the clear limits of the power of purchase in

life, but, by longing and struggle, fixing his mind on what is constantly hiding all true relation to God, he is in as much danger as the man who, with money in possession, is acting on its atheistic character in all his defiance of God and His laws. It is the poor in spirit who are blessed, and not the poor in purse. It is the man who believes in God as his infinite benefactor, from whom *gifts* alone can come, whether or not he has in possession that which enables him to purchase from his fellow-man,—it is he, and he alone, that is blessed.

Never more than in these times, when money is the world's great power, never did all mankind more need the simplest, purest, most childlike belief in God, that life may be truly complete on both sides, toward man and toward God. The two sides will not remain without effect upon each other. The dependence of the one will soften and save from cruelty and haughtiness the independence of the other. He who knows that he is constantly receiving from One above him, cannot be cruel and exacting toward one below him; nay, he cannot keep from being like his great, bountiful God in sweet acts of charity. The independence of the one will add a sense of responsibility and power to the other; he who appreciates the power that God has given him among his fel-

low-men, will more gladly enter the service of that God to whom he owes so much, thankful for the opportunity to do something. The contradiction between the two sides of life is ours. He who rightly knows his God, can hold them both in perfect unity. We can know why it is hard for those who *trust* in riches, whether they possess them or not, to enter into the kingdom of heaven. With man it is impossible: with God all things are possible.

But is there not another higher view which men take of money, and which saves it somewhat from its atheistic aspect? We hear men describe it as God's gift, and say that they are in search of it that they may do good with it. Many a man has started with just such a high intention in his labor of life. But what is the matter with such men? Why is it that so often, as the money comes, the high purpose goes, and at last the man seems satisfied with possessing what he still calls God's gift, and what once he so fondly pictured he would use for God? Is it not another witness to the truth of Peter's words of condemnation, that gift and purchase cannot be combined? The man started with the idea of money as God's gift, but there his thought of God as a giver stopped. The other blessings of God he would purchase with that one: he would get comfort and an easy conscience by

the circumstances of life that made it unnecessary to sin, and easy to be respectable; he would purchase religious blessings by gifts to God's treasury. He acknowledged God as a giver when He made this world rich and powerful at creation, when He made him with the ability to get wealth, when He gave him the circumstances or the opportunities to acquire and to make it; but God as a present giver, one from whose love and free grace alone all that is desirable can come,—that view of Him was crowded out of sight. And so gradually that one gift assumed all power to itself; the very way in which it assumed for itself the religious sanction, made it more powerful when once it was admitted as the object of life's search. In the man's theory, there was no other gift, because money purchased every thing; and so, sooner or later, the man's practise showed the same defect.

If the other view of money made it appear as atheistic, this one, although it has a theistic tone, is utterly anti-Christian. For the one central fact of Christ and His teaching is, that God is always blessing men. He is with them constantly, and wants to be acknowledged, not only as Creator, but as ever-present Father. The gift of Christ, a new gift coming direct from heaven, gives the key to all of our right understanding of God. Money is one of many gifts; it can purchase none

of the others : thy money perish with thee, if thou thinkest that the gift of God can be purchased with money. It may turn in every direction, but it cannot get out of its own sphere. There must be no mercenary giving, to quiet conscience, to buy the way into heaven, to obtain the right to be more eager about getting money. Those things must come direct from God's hand. You cannot buy them, no matter how earnestly you claim that money is God's gift. You must look right to Him for an easy conscience by knowledge of His love, His forgiveness, His guiding graces ; you must get heaven by loving and serving Him to whom heaven belongs, and who constitutes its joys ; you must obtain Church privileges by devotion to Him who founded the Church, and shed His blood for it ; you must gain earnestness and zeal in life by the presence and inspiration of that Holy Spirit who shall guide it, keep it from sin, and make it truly successful. Then, giving and the use of money will be free from selfishness, if the thought of God's constant shower of blessings is vivid by the knowledge of Christ revealing to us the Father's love.

It is because of this that nothing but definite, positive Christianity can meet the dangers of a money-getting life and time. Christ alone tells of God's constant presence and constant gift.

When Tetzel's sale of indulgences stirred to the spirit of reformation the mighty soul of a Luther, it was more than a temporary issue, — it was a great battle in a war in which we all have a part. It touched a great danger of the modern mercantile times that were opening. Luther preached Christ, and that faith in Him alone brings true blessings. Tetzel said, "Give us the money God has given you, and in return you shall have God's other blessings of forgiveness and pardon." On which side is modern society, when its earnestness is given to the pursuit of wealth, and not to those other gifts, greater, more enduring, and deeper, which no money can buy, — the love of God, and the position of humble servants to Him? Is there no need of reformation in all of us? Is there not need for us, with a new struggle, to look to the faith in Christ?

And see how, once more, the relation between rich and poor is touched by this higher view of God as a constant and manifold giver. Must the poor man stand aside, and see his neighbor, who has money, go before him in opportunities of doing good, in acquisition of high and refined motives and character in life? From how much does the want of money shut him out? Of how many of God's gifts does it deprive him? Of but one, — ease of bodily relation toward his fellow-men, one

of the most dangerous gifts that can be bestowed. Shall he stand mourning for that one, while all the time God waits to bestow character here, salvation hereafter, while moral possessions and eternal life are open to him, and means of doing good by personal growth and work which wealth can never buy are at his hand? And where is pride in wealth, — pride of the rich toward the poor? How many gifts has that money given? One only. All others are not involved in it; they all wait on personal connection with God, which poor as well as rich can gain. Acknowledge all the blessings of wealth, see it as God's gift; and if that is really the light in which we appreciate it, if our use of that name for it is any thing more than an excuse to cover our devotion to it, it will make us fall on our knees the more humbly, and ask those other greater gifts which can come alone from that same beneficent hand. Then, to show how purely we look upon it as a gift, we shall lay it all at the feet of Him from whom it came; we shall think, not how little, but how much, we can give; we shall bring it to God, not to purchase more, but to show our gratitude; we shall give it to the cause of Christ, who, by the gift of Himself, has taught us the love, the ever open-handed kindness, of God toward all His children.

“Thy money *perish* with thee.” Money is per-

ishable, — perishable in substance, in form, in possession. Our souls are immortal. As the two come in contact here (and they are in contact in every life, whether it be rich or poor), the question is, Which shall affect the other? Shall we and our money perish together? or shall our lives, knowing our God, lift up the money by the devotion of us to whom it belongs? Shall it dazzle us with its glitter, and prevent our seeing God? or shall we save it by our power of serving God? We are the greater surely, and to us God has opened a path out of this bondage in which earthly things are forever holding us. Walk in it; break the chain, golden though it be, that binds our immortal souls to this earth; and seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and with that gift, all other gifts shall be a blessing, and not a destruction. For that kingdom, God's greatest gift, you are made; be not satisfied with any life of mere earthly gain.

XIII.

THE CHRISTIAN RULE OF LIFE.

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." — EPHESIANS iv. 30.

CONDUCT is the same for all men that ever lived. The law of God is the rule of life; and Christ, with His Gospel, imposed no new duties on men. But in a revelation which gives us special doctrines, and establishes a special institution, and, above all, gives to us the one special life for our guidance and assistance, we have a right to ask what special conception of duty it has given, and what special aid to duty it has bestowed. And then, in answer to that question, this thought, that God can be grieved at what we do, stands forth with peculiar originality and power. Men in their consciences have always known, that, when they do any thing wrong, they violate a law of action; and so God as the law-giver, who says, "Do right," has always dwelt in the world. Men fear for the consequences as they look back upon any fault in life; and so God

as the sovereign, who is angry with the wicked every day, has never been an unfamiliar figure. But God as one between whom and His children there runs the deepest sympathy, so that He is pained in His very soul at their wrong-doing, that was a conception which could come only to men who knew of the love of God; it could be revealed only by One who could tell of the love of God, and of His suffering by man's sin, so that there never could be any doubt of it in men's minds afterwards. As soon as that was done, there was a new aspect to all God's relation to men. It would go everywhere. It would not remain a mere doctrine in men's minds: it would affect men's action; nay, it would find its way into the action of men who had never thought of it as a doctrine. That is the moral power of Christianity, which nothing else can ever have, because nothing else speaks of God and His presence and His love as do the life and death of Christ. "The love of Christ constraineth us;" that love shuts us up to a course of action, and drives us forward on it, because there is ever before us the fear that our actions will wound that love, and our sins grieve the heart of God, who is present with us by His Spirit. Supposing this exhortation to give the distinctively Christian aspect of all action, let us ask what special help it will be to us in the

struggle with the difficulties which beset all right action in this world.

This new range of motive gives us clearer ideas of a standard of character. Our judgments of ourselves and of others are never very clear. We never can tell just what we desire or approve of in character, because there are ever mingled in our action two elements, which, for want of better terms, we may call business and sentiment. A man is dutiful, prompt, faithful, in all his action ; and yet men do not like him : he is not approved of by those who know him. He is called hard, mean, close, narrow ; and yet there is not a man who can put his finger on any neglected duty or unjust action. His relation to others is bad, and yet his duties seem to be performed. It is not religion alone that feels the need of something more : there is the acknowledgment of an inner range of action in which such a man fails. We feel the trouble in ourselves, as we are sometimes perplexed to tell on just which side our duty falls, — whether we ought to be just, or to be generous ; to pay a little more than work is worth, or to instil really sturdy principles of action which may be of great subsequent value. I suppose, that, when Shakspeare drew the picture of Shylock, he meant to show how utterly detestable a man may be while clamoring for a justice which

seems by all the usual laws of life to demand satisfaction.

Or, again : in our own lives we want some self-indulgence. It seems as if we ought to be allowed to have it. Nobody has a right to interfere ; it is our own money that obtains it, and, if it does harm, we say that it injures ourselves alone. And yet men do judge us for it, and we judge ourselves. We feel guilty while we are indulging ourselves ; and in some subtle way that indulgence seems to affect all the tone of our character, and influence our relations to others, ever after. We cannot hold ourselves as straight, or look at other men as boldly, as before.

Or, in another way, we can see the same demand for an inner standard of action. There are two good men, and we call one holy, and to the other we never think of giving the title. What is the difference ? One seems to have his goodness so a part of him that it affects every tone and action. It seems to be as natural to him as it is to the plant to grow, and to the bird to sing. It is a matter of feeling, and yet it is a matter of reality. The other man does rightly, but he does not seem to have his whole heart in his action, and lacks a depth, grace, and thoroughness which is very necessary for completeness.

This universal difficulty, reaching from the way

in which a business-man performs some transaction up to the way in which a Christian says his prayer and thinks of God, shows that we all need some standard of action which goes far beyond all that is seen. We want in some way to embody that feeling of sentiment which is ever hanging around us, bewildering us, and yet not helping us. To such a difficulty these words, "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God," speaks most opportunely. It introduces a standard of action beyond which our feelings cannot wish to go; which must embrace every most delicate feeling of regard for others' rights and wishes, which are so often reached with difficulty. It represents action in this world as something more than a thing of rules and laws which never quite satisfy us. But this world of ours, which came from the heart of a living God, still looks up to Him, and finds in the satisfaction of the wishes and longings of that heart its only perfection and pleasure. We are apt to postpone such a rule as this, and to say that there are other motives to which we have not yet begun to attain, and, when they are satisfied, then this will do to lead us on to a still further advance toward holiness. But we lose its force entirely when we make it thus future. This is a motive which admits of no postponement, because it touches a range of difficulties which

belongs to every man. The act of meanness, of inconsiderateness, of unkindness, which our neighbor despises, and yet which our rule of duty does not touch, is the very one which will grieve the holy Spirit of God. And the higher law can, therefore, help us wherever we stand. Holiness is not a thing at which only good men should aim. If it is that spirit of a devoted life which is not measured by outward rules, it is something which every soul made by God has a right to claim. As the Bible says, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The two go together. Seeing the Lord, living as in His presence, feeling that we are not only judged by His laws, but are measured by His spirit, who watches every disposition and intent of the heart, — that is holiness. It does not wait to be used as a further stage of moral growth: it is an element of true character in the very first stages. We ask its beginnings in the feeling of the heart, without which no action is satisfactory; it goes on, growing apace with each advance into the knowledge of God and the realization of His Spirit, until it reaches perfect oneness with Him. God's choicest gifts are for all morally as well as physically, just as the child sees and uses the same bright sun as does the man of mature power and mind.

And, now that we may be sure that such a motive in life as our text will not lead to any one-sided development of feeling in life, let us see how far that motive goes, and how much it means, not to grieve the holy Spirit of God. A man is grieved by the action of others precisely in proportion to his knowledge and appreciation of their doings, and the very sensitive man has a hard time in life; he is grieved over and over again, when a man of coarser mould would have never felt any annoyance. It is a good thing that we do not know all that our fellow-men are saying about us: our limitations are our protection. But God's infinite nature makes such an injunction as this unlimited in its application to life. He who sees and knows all things is affected by every incident of a man's life. Those great attributes of omniscience and omnipresence are, by such a command as this, brought into a very close connection with us. They are not things which concern simply the work of ruling the world: they have a relation to all our action. The most sensitive being of the universe — He whose presence is everywhere, He from whom we can conceal nothing — must not be grieved. At once, then, we see that holiness is no narrow thing; it is not to be reached by feeling, by prayers, by aspirations, alone. God is grieved at sin, for He is

holy ; He is grieved when we do not bow the knee in worship to Him, for He asks the adoration and submission of His children ; He is grieved at the failure of charity and assistance toward those about us, for He is infinitely kind. But He is grieved also at the neglect of duty, at negligence and sloth, for He is the great Master, ever working Himself, and giving us His work to do ; He is grieved at ignorance and carelessness and imprudence, no matter how good the cause in which they are shown, for He is the God of wisdom, sensitive to every foolish action in all this world of men.

Take the right motive for holiness, the desire and thought of the presence of God, and there can be nothing so far-reaching. It embraces all our work ; it urges us on, mentally as well as morally. It can never become an impracticable, high-flown thing which the common sense of the world so often despises. Its respect is for God's feeling, and it never can get out of His sight.. It adds warmth and feeling to life ; but as it does so, it loses not one particle of the sturdiest traits of character, which the world has learned to respect and to demand for all true life. Only God is thus worthy of man's regard, because He alone covers all life. We have our thought for others, — no one in this life quite gets beyond some feeling

of respect for the opinion of others. And see how character rises as the circle of surrounding critics enlarges! The man who feels that but few people know him and care for him, is particular in the relations where those people touch him. The man widely known, whose face is at once recognized, can never shift his responsibility; and his character is compacted by that constant sense of obligation. God does not leave us thus to wait until we have gained some position, which shall be in itself the means of moral strength; that would be to condemn most of the world to more or less moral carelessness. But He says to every man, woman, and child, "I surround you always, and am grieved at every single deviation of every kind, in word or thought, from the path of highest wisdom and right." What an incentive that is to all action! more effective than any earthly position which we may gain, because it touches the heart, where men cannot see; wider than any human relation, because it applies to all men, is this power of the true knowledge of God in life. It is a treasure, and not a hardship. It consolidates character; it brings all action to one test; it alone is the true promise of symmetrical living. As God lives, we live; and as new secrets of His existence break upon us, we find some new point of sensitiveness in Him, which we must not

grieve; and so a new portion of our life is joined to the domain which is being taken from sin, and given to the rule of righteousness.

Another great motive in life is self-interest. It does great things for men, and the things which it does are sometimes very good and sometimes very bad; but it is a motive with which we cannot dispense, and so this new motive of a desire not to grieve the Spirit of God by our action must have something to say to that. If the only real interest of a man is to succeed in earthly pleasure, I suppose that we cannot expect much help from this new motive; but if we do all grant that a man's best interest is to be growing morally as well as physically and materially, that description of the Spirit of God as that by which we are sealed unto the day of redemption does tell us that it is for our interest to hold closely to this motive of action. For the seal is for two purposes: it protects the document to which it is placed, as well as the owner who places it there. It insures from violent treatment the very paper on which it is placed, and keeps for it the dignified position which its use has bestowed upon it. It gives it a new character, and tells men to be careful how they treat it. You see the sealed documents of old times reposing in the State archives, strong in that seal which

speaks so loudly of the purpose long since accomplished, and of the sovereign long since dead. Men respect that mark, and the very material itself seems changed by the new position that is given it. Through disturbed and dangerous times that seal has brought it safely. Men who could not read it saw that, and it commanded respect; and now it has the weight of historical interest upon it which makes it really valuable.

Some such figure seems to bring self-interest to bear upon this motive of good action. How shall a man, who has felt the desire to serve his God, live until the day of redemption, until the day of safety and honor? It is not easy. There are attacks from without, there are doubts and difficulties from within. Sometimes he himself wonders whether he is in any way different from men who never think of God and of Christ; his actions seem to have no weight and no special motive or character to them. Then comes in this motive. The Spirit of God has been given to each man as his mark of the new life. It claims him for God, and it is his protection. When the man sins, he grieves that, and to sin is to break or injure the seal. The sin may not seem a very great one, but that result is to make it appear detestable. For it turns back to old times; it spoils in the man's own heart that sense of

belonging to God, which is his truest protection; it makes him seem to other men as if he had no thought above the world. The Spirit is grieved; the force of its protection is weakened, and the man is an easier prey to the next attack. Seen in this light, this motive in life gives a reason for that fact which we all know only too well, — that one sin prepares the way for others; each sin tends to break that relation to God which is the only safeguard against all sin.

To resist any temptation in any way is a great thing; the struggle of any soul away from sin up to righteousness is a thing over which angels must rejoice, and with which men must sympathize. Even if the weapon of which the poor, distressed soul lays hold is some common one of worldly policy, it is still a great battle, and that resource came from God also, and has divine possibilities within it. But when the man refuses to sin because he is conscious that the Spirit of God is with him, and has marked him for its own, then surely he has taken a great step forward in moral character and dignity, and attained a position which is worth any sacrifice which he has been called to make. We have a long march, and many battles to fight, before the day of redemption comes. It is impossible for us to see what emergencies are before us. We do not want just

to succeed in any battle, and to come out of it not quite sure whether the victory was worth the loss sustained: we want to feel that our moral battles are making us really stronger, and that each one is an advance to a new position. We do not want to be like poor paupers, who feel that they have survived another day without starving, but we want each day to be adding to our moral position and resources. And such growth is in a motive of life and action which respects and glories in the seal of God upon us, and makes it a reality to ourselves and to others. Such a view of self-interest as that is not selfishness: it has the very power of true manliness in it.

The sorrow of God, that is an idea which no one would have dared to use so boldly, as a motive of life, but He who set up the Cross as the symbol of His religion. It involves that union of authority and love which Christ has alone been able to realize. But how often that sorrow must arise as the sight of sin and suffering comes to the eyes of Him, who loves all His children! Is it not the noblest of purposes to make that sorrow less, — to give up sin, to convert sinners, to teach men so to live, and so to live ourself, that God's sight of His world shall not open again the flood of tears that were shed at Lazarus' grave, nor renew the sufferings of Gethsemane and Calvary in the experience

of the grieved Spirit? That is work large enough for life, and embracing all men in its results. Do it in the name and power of the Cross of Christ, who, suffering once for sins, told us of the love for us and the hatred of sin that belonged to our Father in heaven. Then our personal struggles are no mere transient matters, which help us for the time, and have no significance beyond our own experience: they are real and permanent additions to the sum of achievement, which shall make God, and the world, which is His, glad forever, and successful in those plans which reach to eternity.

XIV.

THE USE OF THE BIBLE.

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." — ROMANS xv. 4.

THE Scriptures are meant to give us patience and comfort. That is the word of our text and of our collect for the second Sunday in Advent. If we appreciate that fact, it will influence very greatly our use of the Scriptures. We want comfort, therefore Bible-reading will not be a hardship; we shall persevere in it through the midst of all difficulties and doubts. Patience means steady continuance, therefore we shall find that Bible-reading must not be a fitful thing, but a steady habit of life, with a good reason behind it. Reading our Bible does not save us: belief in Christ does that; following and obeying Him is the source of eternal life. But the Bible is a help to us, and therefore to neglect it shows that we do not appreciate our salvation, since we are not willing to take every means to make it a full and perfect thing. What view of the Bible, then, can

help us use it better, and make it more truly to us a source of patience and comfort?

The Bible has its own character, which makes it stand by itself as a means of grace. That character is given very distinctly to the Scriptures, in our text. St. Paul is speaking, of course, of the Old-Testament Scriptures, which were all that the Church possessed then; but the same character belongs equally to all the Christian writings that have been added to those former Scriptures. They were written by men for God's purpose. They are God's word, but they come to us through men. The greater part of the Bible is history; all of it was written by men who, when they were writing, were absorbed by their own circumstances and surroundings. They never thought of us as they wrote, though in God's knowledge they were writing for us. Had they attempted to write for future generations, they would have miserably failed, just as any man fails who is too conscious of the watchful eyes of men. They did their work under God's guidance, with the condition that belongs to all genuine human work, by throwing their whole being into the emergency of the times. And so the whole Bible comes to us glowing with human interest. We go to it to learn of God, and out of every page comes the hand of a brother to lead us

into God's presence. God speaks to us by the Spirit in our hearts, and God speaks to us by the Spirit in His Bible. But the two voices are not the same; they say the same things, but differently, so as to meet different wants. One is the revelation of God which belongs to ourselves alone, and makes us feel our individual position before God as truly as if we alone stood on this globe in His sight, and as if we were the only men that had ever lived; the other puts us before Him just as truly, but with a great multitude of saints and sinners that have gone before us. The Bible might have been spoken out of heaven; but, if it had been, it would have been very different from our present book. To the multitude of men what was thus said would have been incomprehensible; just as, when a voice came to Jesus out of heaven, the multitude said that it thundered, and not one besides Christ seems to have discerned the meaning of those sounds. So the intelligibleness of the Bible is in having it spoken to us by human lips.

When we bear in mind this human element, can we not understand how the Bible is for patience and comfort? What makes a man so patient under tribulation as the example and story of those who, men, like himself, have endured and conquered? No proverbs, no human wisdom, no deepest truths of Divine wisdom, can help him as does the embodi-

ment of Divine wisdom in human action. And in trouble what comforts a man so much as human sympathy; the knowledge that others feel with him; the grasp of a hand, or the presence of a friend, who does not say much, but simply makes himself felt as present? And so, when the Bible places us in the midst of men who have been through just such lives as ours, as by its long sketches of history it makes us feel that we are not alone, there is comfort of the Scriptures. For its proper use, then, the Bible says, Know the men who wrote it, and the men whose story it contains. Enter into its human element. Do not take its contents as mysterious words, which, in one way or another, you do not know just how, came down out of heaven. But be impressed with its naturalness. It is printed in the same way and on the same presses as all other books; it lies on our tables in the midst of other books, looking very much like them all. It comes into our houses as a human guest; its form is a pledge to us of God's nearness; its mingling with us is a proof to us of the way in which religion can mingle with our lives. It never frightens us; it is meant for all men, for all can appreciate its sweet humanity, just as all men could be charmed with the words and acts of Jesus of Nazareth. It is God's word: no view of the human element in it

ever depreciates that fact. But God's word is never sweeter and more attractive than when it clothes itself with human life; we know that, from the lives that are around us, filled with God's inspiring breath; we know it, above all, from that Word of God which was made flesh and dwelt among us, and whose history is most fittingly made known to us through our human Bible.

Let us see how this view of the Bible, if borne in mind, will meet many of our difficulties in its use. In the first place, it accounts for the different ways in which men use their Bibles at different times. At one time a man wants to read it devoutly; at another he wants to study it. At one time he wants to see the full connection in which a verse stands, and to look at it in all its lights; at another he just wants to take it to his heart for comfort, repeat it over and over again, and have it speak to him the truth that it holds in the simplest way. These two uses are not at all inconsistent: they support each other. For that is the way in which we deal with men about us. At one time our relation to a man is one of deepest thought; we ask a friend's advice, we study his words, we look at his position, and weigh all that he says, and think over it deeply. At another time all that we ask is the calm repose of

friendship. We are satisfied with the very fact of his presence. We take some word of his to ourselves, for the friendship and comfort with which it is fraught; we repeat it over; we rely upon it. We can use a man in any honest way that we please. The more we have studied into him and his words, the deeper can be our reliance upon him in times when we do not want study, but simple rest and faith. Friendship and knowledge are not to be divorced: the friendship that dreads knowledge is a poor, trembling thing; the knowledge that never goes into friendship is as unproductive as the iciness of an arctic plain.

Since, then, the Bible is a human book, all we have to do is to approach it as men. The dictates of our humanity will tell us how we shall go to it. Our hearts can cling to it, because in no part of it is there wanting a human heart. Words, of which we do not understand the full meaning, can comfort us, just as some man much wiser and deeper than we are can be a strength to us in life. And our minds can be active over it without disrespect, because every thing in it is from a human pen, and asks for a deeper acquaintance. The more we love it, the more we shall study it; and as we study it, our lives will grow into sympathy with it. If, then, any man has been a student of the Bible, but not a lover of it, let him remember that true

sympathy is necessary for true study ; if he has been a reader, but not a student, let him know that as he enters into its facts, and knows his brother in it, the more will he understand God's leading of that brother, and the better will he be able to follow God's leading himself.

People often speak of the difficult or profitless passages in the Bible, and say that they prevent their use of it, and are stumbling-blocks in the way of their feet. They instance the genealogies, and say, "What good can they do us?" They quote the song of Deborah, and say, "Is that good teaching?" They speak of the prophecies, and ask how they, busy men, can get time to study them so as to understand them. Here is a difficulty that this human view of the Bible takes away. All parts of the Bible are not alike, just as all parts of human life are not alike, pleasing or instructive. I read a man's book, and it charms me ; I meet the man, and perhaps his manners produce precisely the opposite effect. I care for the poet when he sings, I do not care for him when he eats and sleeps ; and yet the very fact that he is a man, living just as I live, having the same desires to satisfy, is the very thing that makes him able to stir my soul by his song, and so the meanest fact of his life has deepest significance. But, after all, it is the poem that he writes that I care for most. So

with our Bible: it is human; it passes through every degree of human experience, from the lowest to the highest. No part of it is without instruction, but all in it is not alike. The shell of human life is valuable: it is the kernel of Divine truth that nourishes. Shall we reject Christ's words because the genealogies of Chronicles seem to be unsatisfying? There is enough in the Bible that is plain, enough that is true to a Divine inspiration; use that. There are things in St. Paul's Epistles that are hard to be understood, so said St. Peter; but there are words of Christ's that were the salvation of that apostle. Begin the Bible, and use it where it touches you, and is plain; from that go forward. It is all useful: every detail in it will help to the appreciation of the deepest wisdom that ever fell from the Master's lips; every life in it will shed light on His great sacrifice; every prophecy has truth in it. Every genealogy has its lesson, even, but to him who uses it rightly, and comes at it in the way which God shows him. The Bible is as varied as human life. It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Christ towers above all in it; and no genealogy, or song, or prophecy will ever be an excuse that we have not learned in it of Him. "Come unto Me" are words perfectly intelligible, though we may understand

but little about preaching to the souls in prison, or baptism for the dead. The Bible's difficulties are but proofs of its nearness to our daily life, which itself is simple in its plain facts and duties, but full of dark places with its hard problems.

But men have used their Bibles so much, and they tire of them; they read them through and through, and then say that they know them. Familiarity and monotony sadly affect our Bible-reading. It is not a large book, and it is the same thing over and over again. If the Bible is a mere text-book, such a thing is perfectly conceivable; its words are heard, and then they are known. But, if it is God speaking in human life, how can we ever be done with it? Are you done with your friends? Do you turn them off, as exhausted, and look for others? Is there the meanest life of which you can say that you know every thing in it? You change year by year, and your Bible will change with you. Your new position in life will make you see the life there in a new position. You read, or had read to you, as a child, the story of David and Goliath. It was a story of adventure and heroism, and so it was fascinating. A little later it was the simple reliance on God by the stripling alone from a faithless army that was attractive. Farther on, your knowledge and experience made you see the contest as the first starting

forth of Israel's life to return to its God after days of degeneracy and disgrace. And so the story has gone on, gathering new meaning as the significance of it as a part of God's dealing with man, and man's struggle toward his God, became evident. This is one of the lowest examples. We could trace them all up to the growth, year by year, of the significance of that wonderful story of the great Saviour. It is never the same; it has life in it, and so has the whole Bible. It waits to bestow new blessings. We grow up into it, and so can read it over and over again. Our own life is ever new to us, and its life is ever new to our life. There is a human spirit in it that makes it belong to all persons at all times who have the breath of human life within them. The child and the gray-haired saint read over the same words; and they appeal to both, as far as their understandings can comprehend them, because there is human life in both. The Bible goes with us at all times: it has the power of all true literature in it. But it has more than that in it: it is God's hand in human life, — the greatest fact of all life, — and so belongs to all men; it is the history of His dealing with men, leading up to that crowning point of the revelation of Jesus Christ. And therefore the Bible has the charm of human life leading men up to God.

There is another set of difficulties in connection with the Bible that closes it to more or less men to-day, — those arising from the doubts that have been thrown upon it. It has been criticised; crude and false statements as to scientific facts are said to have been found in it; discrepancies in dates and numbers have been discussed in it. And many men, without knowing much about what has been discovered and said about all these points, just feel that their faith is distracted, and that they cannot read their Bibles as they once could. But what opened the Bible to such attacks was the neglect of its specific character as His revelation of Himself through men. It was considered to be God's infallible word, like the revelation of the laws of morality, and as truly and literally as the word which the Spirit speaks to the heart of every Christian. Every word from cover to cover was perfectly, literally, and absolutely true. The whole view of the Bible was wrong, since it made no allowance for its human element, and for the nature of its transmission as a human medium of God's presence. No wonder that it was attacked. No wonder that men, finding facts in God's book of nature that opposed statements in this absolutely true book of the Bible, brought the two in contact. It was right in them to do so; it was the best thing they could do. It led men to

look into their Bibles, and understand what they were. It opened the whole field of biblical criticism that is ours to-day. The Bible began to be studied in its proper relations. Its books and its authors and its facts were investigated. It was seen that there must be the imperfections of human life in a human book. It was seen that each age wrote the book of its time truly and in its own spirit. A new set of facts came to light by this larger knowledge. As increased knowledge brought new facts, it increased Bible-study. Science said, God does not lead man. New study of the Bible showed wondrous facts of His leading, which science of inanimate nature could not understand, and, above all, could not rival. Those facts were what the Bible were to teach. It became the Bible of a living humanity; it became a richer book than it ever was before; texts came out in new light; the very darkness showed the stars; it culminated in importance as it reached those facts of Christ, His character, His life, His death, which no science could explain, and which have become firmer as time has gone on, and knowledge has grown. The attacks were hard, but they were full of blessing. They have made it easier to use the Bible than ever before. It is not the old, mysterious book it was, a sad trial to our faith. We can read it now, and get patience and comfort

from it. Once it was a book full of detached sayings: now it is a living body. A good deal of superstitious regard for it has happily vanished. Men do not open it now at random, and feel that the text the eye first glances at is the one that is wanted. It is used intelligently; men know its parts, and, when they want a text, turn to it with ready and knowing hands. Books on its interpretation and its use fill our libraries. Lives of Christ guide devout souls to true knowledge of the life that the Bible can alone give in its simplicity. In estimating the amount of Bible-reading to-day, account must be made of all that reading of books about the Bible which bring out the treasures of its pages more richly than ever before.

The whole lesson of these times of doubt and discussion has been, that we must read our Bibles more diligently and intelligently than ever before. The times demand that; they are full of blessing to him who does do it. Above all, we must read our Bibles as God gave them to us; we must know what the Bible is, and see how great a blessing God has given us in a book where religion shall meet us in its sweetest and most human form, and show itself as a guide to our lives here. The spirit of the times tells us to be very careful how we use it. Use it wrongly, with mere formalism, with blind and careless superstition, and there are men

waiting who are only too anxious to make it your destruction, as they shake your faith in it by doubts regarding it. But use it as a man, put your heart to it just as you are, and it will bless you, and no man can take it from you. If you are a man whose life allows you to study it, do it faithfully; and, in these days of widespread biblical study and knowledge, who has not this chance in a degree just suited to his opportunities and abilities? In your devout reading of it, put your soul into it, as a man who wants to be led as God has led other men, and your use of it will defend it for yourself and others. You will have it in your soul, where it cannot be taken away.

We often dwell upon our attachment to the Bible on account of its associations. It is the book of our race. It has been the strength of our Anglo-Saxon literature that the Bible was behind it. Its power has shown itself in strange emergencies, and many a text has new power in it on account of its use at some critical time in our past history. Memories of those who have lived and died in the strength which they gained from it cluster around every page, and favorite passages bring to our minds those who loved and marked them. Stories from its books still have tones in them that were dear to us as they first opened to us the treasures of Scripture. See how

like gathers to like. The great human assistance draws the sweetest human memories to it, and some saint of our own household joins his tones to the noble song or simple story of the Hebrew prophet and evangelist; and deep answereth to deep. May we add heartily our voices to the great chorus, and make the Bible richer, because it has led us, too, in the path of life! Do not make it a mere ornament of life: it cannot be content with such a place; it is too earnest and deep a gift for that. Struggle with all your might toward heaven, and this will help you; long with all your heart to know Christ, and this will teach you; strive with all your heart to love God, and this will show Him to you; aspire with all your being to reach the perfection which God has offered to the human character, and this book will make you one of a long line of prophets and kings, men, women, and children, who, by His guidance, have been going on to the city of God. You, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, shall have hope.

XV.

THE USE OF PRAYER.

"Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." — JOHN xvi. 23.

PRAYER is the action by which a man realizes and utilizes the upward and heavenly relation of his life. It speaks of a dependence in life other and greater than the facts and powers of the world about us. As the world, with its cares and its pleasures, recedes, prayer always becomes more prominent as a feature of true life. There have been ages of prayer in the world's history, — times when men gave themselves up to lives of prayer. They were days when the course of the world was so identified with wickedness that the only safety for a man who dreaded the destruction to his soul which life in the world threatened, was to separate himself from it, and to give himself to a life of prayer. Both by the life from which he fled, and by the life in which he took refuge, the hermit witnessed to the division between the power of the world and prayer. Devotion of a less ascetic type,

—that which belongs to the ordinary man—is said in these days to have diminished, as the calls of life and the knowledge of the powers of this world and of the earth have enlarged. As life matures in the individual, prayer too often becomes less frequent. As the cares and pleasures of the world enter, childhood's habits are gradually abandoned, and a working life is supposed to be the proper substitute for a praying life. In family life, with perfect complacency the father leaves to the mother the church-going and the devotional training of the family's life. "I am too busy," or "I must rest, so as to be ready for to-morrow's duties," is a line of defence for such action which is supposed to be perfectly impregnable, and behind which many a man has taken his shelter, and almost forgotten that he ever occupied a different position. Some memories of the habits of childhood float through the mind; but they seem almost to come from another existence, as they speak of a time when worldly powers and worldly cares were not the absorbing things of life.

But, in all this recognition of the world, both of matter and of circumstance, as a great absorbing and monopolizing power, there is one point at which prayer makes itself a more reasonable and necessary thing than ever before. It is the point of the controlling power which still remains in the

will and soul of the individual man or woman. Put two men, two women, two boys, two girls, in precisely the same position, the same motives of profit surrounding them, the same circumstances drawing and pushing them, and gradually they draw apart. They will not, they can not, follow the same line. The characters within them begin to tell; the soul of each asserts itself. One uses, the other neglects, his opportunities; one takes the right, the other the wrong; one sees all things from a mean, the other from a noble, point of view. The action of that hidden will, that internal power, is so important, that we are often inclined to exaggerate it, and to think that it acted, when it really did not, and when external circumstances really determined the path of motion. We look back over our lives, and see, that, at many points where we thought that we were choosing, we really had very little to do with the direction in which we moved. Our parentage, our training, our education, our necessities, were making up our decision. But all the more important become those moments when we did and do make those decisions; more and more valuable in proportion to the mass of the world's life about us, which is ever influencing us, becomes that power which shall regulate it, just as the rudder of the ship becomes of all the more importance as the wind and the waves are

strong and the ship is great. And that power declares itself distinctly as a moral power.

Our inclinations for ease, and our desire for profit, those the world is ever ruling and influencing. They are akin to the desire of the animal for rest, and the tendency of the plant toward growth. External motives are forever influencing them. But the determination for or against the right is a moral action, in which the soul itself speaks, and in which it is called to set itself against the ruling forces of the world, to decide for the seen against the unseen, for character rather than ease, for permanent benefit rather than immediate gain. Such moments, however few they may be, really make up the heroic part of a man's life. The lives in which they are most evident as moving forces are those which constitute the world's richest treasure; they are the lives of true human power. These moments, when the will asserts itself as the real force of human life, need assistance and support, and all the more so on account of their position in the midst of a material world which grudgingly admits their reality and necessity. When our bodily appetites impel us to seek food, here is creation all about us, offering the precise supply for those appetites; when the tired brain of man seeks relief, the beauty of nature opens the way to quiet and refreshing

thought ; when the social side of man demands satisfaction, he finds it ready at hand in all the associations of companionship with his fellow-man ; when his restless ambition pushes him forward, he finds the combinations of human life opening paths to pre-eminence of various kinds. But when his moral power would demand the assertion of the will of his undying soul, where shall he look, if not to his Father's will, from which he came, and to which all his efforts belong ? There alone can be found the supply of strength to that, for which no other view of life has a word of encouragement, and which all other powers of the world would leave lonely and helpless. The man who neglects prayer because life is so busy, the man who never thinks of God because there is so much else to be thought of, burdens his life with a sad contradiction. It is just because of those two facts that the best part of him needs to bring him to his knees in the presence of his Father. It is because the bustle of the world is so great, drowning the still voice of his own heart, that he needs the quiet of the closet, where the world is shut out, and he can understand what the true power of life really is. It is the very increase of knowledge of the world's resources, the very multiplication of the world's activities, in these days, which ought to make our prayers deeper and more constant.

It is the very fact that human activity has been vindicated from the taint of necessary violence and wickedness, which belonged to it in ruder times, which ought to put us on our guard against being swept away by the force of its swiftly moving current. The man who prays is the man who ennobles himself. He turns deliberately from material to moral power. As he asserts the power of God, he, as the child of God, lays claim to power for Himself. The humility of prayer leads, like all genuine humility, to the deepening of true character.

This view of prayer, as connected with the exercise of will in our own lives, helps us with regard to the answers which we may expect to receive to our prayers. We pray, and yet we have to work with proper means, that the very result for which we have asked may be reached. We pray, and that for which we pray often seems long in coming, and sometimes seems to be brought by methods apart from God's special work for us. And just so we find our wills working in this world, often complicated so closely with things over which we have no control, that we find it impossible to tell how much of what we have done is owing to ourselves, and how much to the inevitable circumstances of our life. We use the ordinary methods of life for the promotion of those objects

on which our will is fixed ; and there is no greater encouragement in all life than to learn, that, when that will is really in the true path of righteousness, it finds a thousand motives and means in ordinary life by which to strengthen itself, and accomplish its purposes. At times that will of ours must assert itself in all the solitariness of its supremacy ; but it is alive and working, not only then, but when it is using and guiding all the events of life to the true end of its and their existence. When, then, that will rejoices in prayer, to gain the support and assistance of our Father's will, shall it not expect to find in Him the same rich and fruitful variety of working ? The will of God, in answer to the request of our prayer, may and does flash out at times the answer with all the readiness of a personal soul. Such answers will come most frequently in matters of our own spiritual life, where heart can act directly upon heart, where our cry for comfort or pardon or strength can receive the immediate response from Him who knows all our thoughts. But we bring our other wants to Him, we put before Him the whole range of our wishes and desires ; for in them all mingles that will of ours, which needs strength and assistance. The answer will come in the purifying of our own wills from those things which are not good for us. It will come through those same channels which He

has Himself ordained,—the activity of our life, the events of the world about us, the circumstances of ordinary existence. That is the highest will which can turn things to its own purposes; which can, out of the most untoward circumstances, bring the result which is desired; which in contradictory conditions sees its greatest opportunity. And, when the cry of affection goes up for the prolonged life of one who is dear, God shows His greatest power when He gives that life in a higher and better form, even though He does not spare the blow of bodily death, which is the lot of all men here. Those answers of God to our prayers which lead us up to higher views of life and its happiness are surely His best answers. Those answers in which He claims for Himself all the ordinary processes of the world's life are surely the most encouraging answers. They are the ones most in accordance with our mode of life here; they are the ones which give us the most boldness to claim for the cause of righteousness the most discouraging circumstances; they are the ones which show us how Divine is the law by which we work in this world. It is not a poor arrangement, to which we must grudgingly submit,—this constant struggle with adverse circumstances, this imperceptible blending of our wills with the order of the world about us: it is God's own method. And when, in

answer to our prayer, no miraculous answer comes, our faith can let us know that we have found one of those points in which God's will will work less directly, but as surely, toward the end which He has in view,—our rescue and salvation. With such a God, we can be more patient when our wills are called to work under the same restrictions; we can understand the equal power of self-assertion and of self-abnegation; we can be ready for either the moment of unimpeded and instant action, or for that of steady, wise, and cautious adjustment of all life's forces toward their proper end. So the promise of Christ, with its great comprehensiveness, is true: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." Always surely, but not always as we think, leading our wants to their highest aspects, teaching us to honor more, as of His ordering, the life in which we live, the answer will come whenever prayer is our will going for assistance to the will of our Father.

And just as unlimited is the command to pray. Prayer is for all men. Of course, the will of the distressed and suffering man needs help and strength; and so, in their troubles, men pray: and poor men and dying men are supposed to find special comfort in that exercise. But it is equally for the strong man in the current of life that prayer is necessary. That is precisely the man

who is most in danger of losing his soul, of thinking that his will is strong, and is ordering his life, when really it is his life and its necessities which are ordering his will, and leading it an ignorant and ignominious captive. The man who has become identified with his own success, who looks upon every thing from the point of view of where he stands to-day, is the man who more than any other needs to enter each day's activity with the thought of the nature of his life, as it is in the sight of God ; needs to end each day with the review of his life, as it is freed of all its temporary surroundings ; needs to separate the weeks with the day of worship and prayer ; needs to break in on the weeks and days with hours of devotion and of thought of God. Prayer is for such men almost more than any others. It is for men of to-day more than it was for monks and hermits of old. It is for the men as much as it is for the women. And, therefore, it has no limits of time or place. Those are conditions of material things ; and, for the sake of asserting the victory of the spiritual over the material, we consecrate special times and places of prayer. But, as a spiritual exercise, it has no such limits. Quicker than the lightning flash the soul of man can place itself in the presence of its Father. Without moving from where he is, the man can converse with his God. He is a

free man, although he stands to men's eyes, for the time, in the chains of his earthly conditions. You see him as the world makes him ; but, by the power of prayer, he is ever summoning to his aid, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, a power which is greater than them all.

But, in such a world as ours, prayer is not easy. It never will be, because the whole tendency of life is to obliterate our sense of independent will, and to make us the creatures of circumstances. And then, when our will is gone, we doubt whether God has any personal will, whether He, too, is not governed by the world which He has made. The assistance to prayer must meet us at that point of personal knowledge. So, in our text, Christ offered Himself to His disciples. It was in His name that they were to ask the Father. He was known to them as the one who had stood out against the mastery of the world's life at every point. His approaching death, by which He was to defy the world, and to open eternal life, was to complete the work. He had told them of their ability to do the same ; and in all His exhortations to be born again, to take up the cross, to lose their life that they might find it, He had pointed them to the one path of real human power. He had told them of God's being and love with a conviction and a clearness which could come from the

Son of God alone ; He had shown and proved that love, by His own life, because, by reason of that love, the Father had sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Was it any wonder that Jesus, when He was about to leave His disciples, knowing, that, in spite of all its value and power, prayer would be as hard for them, as likely to grow irksome, as likely to degenerate into formalism, as it had been in the history of mankind before, said to them, for encouragement and power, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in my name*, He will give it you"? It was the greatest proof of Christ's appreciation and value of what He was to men. Put those words into the mouth of any other man, however pure and high his character, and imagine their sound of blasphemy. Such a result of opening up the way of approach to the throne of God belonged alone to that life which had come from the presence of God, and told the unclouded message of His love. And it does the same to-day.

May we not feel that the reality and warmth of our prayers will be precisely in proportion to our knowledge of the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord? The formalism of our Christianity will make our prayers formal. We shall rise from our knees, and go back to our life, and rely upon the world, and not upon God, yield our wills to the things about us, if there is

no appreciation in our hearts of Him who has come from heaven to be our Saviour. We shall hurry past our religious duties, to get to our day's work ; we shall consider their presence in the midst of life an intrusion, when we know nothing of Him who has come into the midst of our lives from heaven and from our Father. It will be hard to hold to that which has its reason in the oneness of God with us, and His nearness to the world, when every thing about us speaks against such facts, and we have no share in the one great personal revelation which speaks of them and for them. And the despairing cry of many a man, "I know I ought to pray," would be best answered by his changing it into these words: "I know I ought to be the servant and disciple of Christ." And where can there be such a thing as an unanswered prayer, when we have the knowledge and example of Him whose whole life found its power in submission to the Father ; who prayed, and never doubted that out of all His suffering His Father would bring the victory to Him ? There is a higher side to every event of life : we find that in Christ ; and then we have a whole range of answers waiting for our prayers, which God will give us, when our heart in its ignorance knows not what to ask, and simply in faith pours all its wants into its Father's ear.

Prayer, then, as the greatest gift to life, like all other gifts is a responsibility. We cannot take it up, and use it thoughtlessly, carelessly, and occasionally. If we do that, it will be taken from us as unworthy possessors. But as a possession of the immortal soul, given by God, and helped by Christ, if used faithfully, earnestly, and constantly, it will grow in value, and be the greatest treasure of our earthly lives. How have we used it in the past? Has it gradually slipped away from us, as we have failed to appreciate its greatness and its blessedness? If so, as children once more we need to gather around the Father's footstool, and to renew all the hope and strength of this life, which He has given us, by the act which tells at once of His love to us and of our devotion to Him.

XVI.

MUSIC AND RELIGION.

"And four thousand Levites praised the Lord with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith." — 1 CHRONICLES xxiii. 5.

KING DAVID knew that his death was approaching ; and, as he makes provision for the future conduct of that temple which it was committed to his son Solomon to build, we are not surprised, from what we know of the king's personal genius, that the musical service receives liberal attention. He allots four thousand, more than one-tenth of all the Levites of adult age, to the temple choir ; he gathers together all the instruments which he had invented in his long and enthusiastic musical experience, and bequeaths them for future use to the young nation. And so, bound up with the fervor of devotion, the prophetic insight, the typical prominence, and the religious aspiration of the great king of Israel, whose throne was to be the seat of the incarnate Son of God, is the musical growth and feeling of men, which has never ceased from that

day to this. We may therefore with profit endeavor to find some of the relations between religion and music, as they are united either in our Church-service or our daily life.

“To praise therewith,” that is the object of that musical appointment of the Psalmist king; and it expresses well the attitude of the Bible towards music. Musical expression is represented to us as a human activity, originating with Jubal, one of the descendants, not of Seth, but of the out-cast Cain. But, like all such human endowments in the Bible, it is found gravitating back to God, the centre of human power, and so sharing in the fruits of that work of redemption whose progress it is the object of the Bible to depict. Miriam at the Red Sea, Deborah after the victory over Sisera, Jephthah’s daughter advancing to celebrate her father’s triumph, the women of Israel singing of the exploits of the young hero David, David himself before the ark, the temple-service with its full appointment, the brilliant Solomon the author of a thousand and five songs, the songs of degrees by which the people went up to the worship of the new temple, the Passover hymn before the passion, the growing psalmody of the young Christian Church’s “hymns and spiritual songs,” the golden harps and new song of the heavenly Jerusalem, — these tell the course of

the redemption of music, keeping pace with the growing revelation of God.

In the Bible, there is no theory of musical effect and power, there is no fundamental treatment of the nature of music as related to all life, such as we can read in Plato's "Republic;" but there is the determination, which we should expect in the Bible from its nature everywhere else, to give to music a subject which shall redeem it by being worthy of it. At the period of the decline of Greek life, which had made so much of the philosophic side of music, Plutarch wrote, "The chiefest and sublimest end of music is the graceful return of our thanks to the gods." In those words the wisdom of the Bible representation is vindicated; and it is seen, from an entirely extra-biblical experience, that a worthy conception of God is the only thing which can give the true inspiration of music, and keep it pure and noble through all its strains. Here is a reason why music and religion should never be divorced; why the musical expression of the Church has a claim to share in every new musical advancement, and must not forever cling to old forms: it is for the sake of music as well as of religion. Men must have a God to praise, and must praise Him with the best instrument they have. God is necessary for our amusements, and for our recreations, or

they will sink down and down, drawing with them every noblest faculty and every highest endowment. Why need men and women who have the greatest advantages for knowing God, allow those very advantages to turn away their hearts from Him? What Plutarch wrote, again has an almost startling significance to-day, as it shows how dangers are reproduced in the world's experience: "Our men of art, contemning its ancient majesty, instead of that manly, grave, heaven-born music, so acceptable to the gods, have brought into the theatres a sort of effeminate musical tattling, — mere sound without substance." A God near to us, a God inspiring every action, raising the whole tone of life, is the only thing which can save our art from sinking to the depths which excited the alarm and warning of a heathen philosopher.

And then look at some of the features of the revelation of God which the Bible gives us, and see how they agree with the best features of musical life and growth. The Bible reveals God to man, and man to himself; it opens depths of meaning which ordinary life cannot sound; it calls man the son of God; it bases itself upon the love of God, which passeth knowledge; it speaks of things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. All such statements, which are

very common in the Bible, combine to make up a very bold position ; it is one over which human knowledge and scientific definition are always stumbling, and yet it is one for which the simplest souls are, time and time again, able to thank God out of the experience of some consoled and strengthened life.

If we allow music any rights of its own, however little any one of us may pretend to understand its mysteries, they must be based upon its claim to give expression which is beyond the power of words, and to utter conceptions which thought cannot formulate. The constant attempt to heighten the effect of words by uniting music to them ; the existence of musical compositions which are not chained to words, and which it would be folly for words to attempt to interpret ; the undoubted effect of music upon individuals or upon masses of men, — those are simple facts which tell of the value of music to men, in its power to take them out of the surroundings even of the deepest thoughts, to lift their aspirations where nothing else can go, to carry them into the presence of a power of harmony and order more fundamental than the skill of the hand or the logic of the mind can represent. Is there such a sphere of life ? Business and material life disregard it ; science, with its knowledge of facts, says

that it can tell nothing about it; religious faith alone answers joyfully and surely, "Yes. What we see is but the least part of what there is; our thoughts are but broken lights of God, and of His deep existence, out of which we came." In such a faith music finds its character and its sure foundation. It may soar into the highest stretches, out of the reach of man's thought, and it is still kept by the power of God.

And here is to be seen the significance of one of the most striking facts of history. In our time, when science, the knowledge of the seen, has been reigning supreme in the minds of men, music has become such an art as it never was before. A time that deals with the materials of the earth, in architecture still has to stand despairingly, though rejoicingly, before the Parthenon and Cologne Cathedral, in sculpture before the Venus of Milo, in painting before the Sistine Madonna. It seems as if our knowledge of material had taken from us the power to get at its spirit and its capabilities, and to deal with it in the spiritual power which has at times belonged to generations before us. But in music the soul of man, unconquerable, has found the outlet which was denied it by the spirit of the times elsewhere. Its greatest triumphs have been within the last hundred years. It has been the voice of God speaking, to these

times of material prosperity and of scientific thought, of something that is beyond. It has stirred the deathless soul. And, as that soul looks upward, where shall it find its satisfaction but in its God ; as it asks for a word from beyond the realm of human discovery and thought, why should it not claim, as the very answer to all its longings, the perfect revelation of Jesus Christ ? I care not how little or how much we may know of the technique of music, we all have a right to claim the spirit of music ; and without that the deepest technical knowledge may make the man a mere instrument, giving to others what he does not get himself : and that spirit is the knowledge and love of a God above and beyond us.

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell ;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music, as before.

Then there is the universality of religion. It is meant for all men : there are all grades and kinds of reception of it. The Gospel of Christ is for all : it speaks to children and to old men ; it has truths for the simple, and doctrines for the wise ; it meets all nations of men, each according to its nature and its needs. There are misunderstandings and divisions among its followers,

but not in the religion itself. In that it has true fellowship with an art which has a gift for all men, which speaks very differently and in varying tones, but, in one way or another, affects the simplest and the most cultured, appeals to the joyful and to the sorrowing, defies lines of nationality and of language, and is appropriated by all according to the needs of each. *Airs* which musical pedants despise, touch the hearts of men, and influence their lives; and, on the other hand, compositions which seem confused sound to the ignorant, are a source of deepest inspiration to the cultivated and appreciative ear. It is an art in which, above all others, there is no true place for intolerance, just as in religion there ought to be the deepest appreciation, as nowhere else, of the rights and feelings of others.

In times when men are strangely jostled together, when no one can entirely separate himself from the companionship of those very different from himself, when the Church has a mission to all classes and conditions of men, it cannot afford to disregard this great art of equally broad affinities. It cannot afford to use it only in one way, or to minister to only a few classes of minds by it. It wants all its resources, from the simplest and solidest to the most complicated and delicate. It wants its aid, that in its services the Church

may, while keeping true to its Divine character, reflect that comprehensiveness which must belong to a religion of Divine love.

The object of religion is harmony : for that it labors, — harmony between heaven and earth, between man and man, harmony in the life of the individual, with its varying experiences. It is a difficult task, one of which men despair, one which only the Divine hand can produce on this strangely complicated instrument of the universe. The power of man to appreciate harmony finds a response in the growing resources of the musical art ; and the yearnings of man for a better existence, where life shall not clash with death, joy with sorrow, and love with hate, finds an answer in a revelation which destroys death, comforts sorrow, and makes love seen everywhere. There could be no better expression for heaven, as the place where such a revelation finds its completion, than as the place of music. The harmony of music, answering the wants of man, is drawn from seemingly hopeless materials, which are silent and sometimes even discordant, until genius forms them and inspires them. And in like manner it is out of the sin and suffering of the world, and out of the afflicted life of an incarnate Saviour, that God's great work of harmony came. Does not every analogy teach us a deeper

faith, teach us to believe that the great Master will not leave this a place of discord? that, hidden as the harmony may be, His hand cannot have failed to produce it? There is forgiveness for sin, there is atonement for sinners, there is life from death, there is the personal power of an everlasting God and Saviour, speaking harmony and comfort to the souls of men. He who knows not that, is false, not only to the teachings of religion, but, as religion herself would say, also to the teachings of God's great gift of music. Religion furnishes that in which music ought to make us ready to believe: the one makes plain that after which the other is blindly feeling, and they unite their forces together to tell the story of a protecting and saving and loving God. He is the great Musician, whose harmonious interpretation of all life's mysteries we need to hear in Jesus Christ.

Experience, like a pale musician, holds
A dulcimer of patience in his hand,
Whence harmonies we cannot understand,
Of God's will in His worlds, the strain unfolds
In sad, perplexèd minors.
We murmur, "Where is any certain tune
Of measured music in such notes as these?"
But angels, leaning from the golden seat,
Are not so minded: their fine ear hath won
The issue of completed cadences;
And, smiling down the stars, they whisper, "Sweet."

There is a great deal of cheap jesting and small criticism expended upon Church music. Of course, it will be a hard question to deal with, — harder than any other, harder to-day than ever before, — because it is the attempt to deal with one of the points at which our ordinary life comes in contact with our Church life; it is one of which the conditions are constantly changing, and one in which a large number of different tastes, presumably united in religious desire, but as presumably differing in circumstances of external position, all have to be considered. Questions of detail and method in such a matter are very difficult. But for the true appreciation of the privilege and duty of the musical portion of religious service, it is necessary for us to know that conscientiousness in the ordinary culture of our life, charity and consideration for all, and a deep feeling of faith and thankfulness toward God, are conditions for true worship in the house of God. Sensational music will receive its severest blow when, by their private lives, Church-members are more careful of the training of themselves and of their children; there will be less fault-finding and petty criticism when we recognize the fact, that a religion for all men may take many forms of expression, and use many vehicles of feeling; there will be the true spirit of worship

when we all appreciate, that, in the worship and service of God and of Christ, we are near to the fact which contains all the power of life within it, which surpasses all other things which ever enter the circle of our experience, and that therefore, to voice our feelings, the noblest and best strains of the divinest art are not to be admired for themselves, but are only the humble contribution of thankful men on the altar of a Master, who by His harmony puts them all to shame.

May God give us the true gift of music, by opening our ears to hear His word, by loosening our tongues to tell forth His praise, by inspiring our hearts with the knowledge of our sonship of the Father! and so we shall be of that choir who, in the land where there is to be no temple, shall make the harmony of the world to come. We are training ourselves, and we are being trained, for that. Hard, adverse conditions have no right to discourage us. The new song is to be the one sung by those who have come out of great tribulation. He who, amid all the discords and calamities of human life, has kept the sense and power of music alive in the world, He has been made known to us; and all the strains of life's psalm reflect our love and devotion to Him. We are being educated for the eternal music of

heaven. Its elements are with us now in the knowledge of Christ Jesus ; to them may we be faithful, and so do our part rightly, both here and hereafter !

XVII.

PERSONAL RELIGION AND MISSION- ARY EFFORT.

“And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” — ACTS xv. 3.

A WORD and its peculiar use are often the best landmark of the progress of a great movement. Just at some peculiar crisis it has received an extension of its meaning or its application; and ever after, wherever that word goes, in its new character it carries the story of that event. As the new meaning of the word mingles with the old ones, it tells that a new or larger idea has found its way into all the relations which that word formerly covered; and the old and the new help to interpret each other. Such a process going on as to the word “conversion,” we find in our text. It was just beginning to be applied to what we call missionary effort; it was just receiving that application with which we are so familiar in such a phrase as “the conversion of the world.” Hith-

erto it had been a word signifying the turning of the people of Israel back to that which had been revealed as the very centre of their national life, — the power and knowledge of Jehovah. In that sense it had been used by the prophet Isaiah in that passage about hardening the hearts of the people, which is quoted by three of the evangelists among the utterances by Christ, and which has given so great currency and familiarity to the word “converted.” Jesus had applied the word still farther in that saying of His, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” That was carrying it to the personal life of each Israelite.

But here the word leaps at once to its largest extension, that which Isaiah had foreseen as the strangest, most distant, most convincing fact of God’s power, — the conversion, the turning to Israel’s God as if He were their own, of the isles of the Gentiles. It was a step of doctrinal progress which throws into the shade every disputed point over which the Church has been troubled since then. Of course, as they passed through Phenice and Samaria with such a message of the conversion of the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas would be received with joy. The hope and expectation of some such announcement had in a vague way been the strength of all that was good in those

despised countries for many years. And it was equally natural that the Jews, who felt that they were the people who had the only hope from God, could not understand the conversion of the Gentiles. To what could they turn again, who had never been endowed with the great central power of all life? We can imagine the outcry that arose at such a misuse of the word: how warnings were uttered as to the result of this dangerous extension of Scripture terms; how it was conclusively proved, that, to apply this word in this way, involved the terrible consequence of admitting, as in some way connected with the power and gift of God, all the unsanctified endowments and forces which had prevailed in the previous life of those Gentile nations. We can imagine all that, for it has been heard a great many times since that day. We are only surprised that the weak infant Church stood such an ordeal, which, when repeated in much milder forms, has often shaken so seriously what has seemed like very strong organizations. We feel sure that the Church did sustain such a test only because there was Divine power within it, because the Master's hand held it, and because the forward step which it was taking was founded upon the eternal truth of God, which it was its duty to reveal.

That forward step was taken in connection with

Christian missions. The new principle was the missionary principle; the truth which made men bold was that with which Christ has gone over the face of the earth, declaring that God is the Father of all men. Forever, then, missions are identified with the progressive thought of the Church and of the world; they belong to the men whose aspirations are largest and whose thoughts are boldest. They, and they alone, bear witness to a change of thought, which opened a new mode of life and of mutual relation throughout the world. They, in their establishment and triumph, are a comfort and strength to all who have any battle to fight of the large idea against the small one, of the truth of God against the opinion of man, or of new movements against old methods. There is everlasting power in those words of Christ to every live and active man, "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."

And, as the missionary spirit gave to this word "conversion" its largest extension and truest meaning, so it keeps that word free from a recurrence of the narrowing process which had fastened upon it, and of which there is ever danger of a repetition. This is a very important matter: it opens the whole question of the relation between personal religion and missionary effort. The

word "conversion" is a recognized one in Christian literature and conversation; it is one which cannot be banished, even if there were a desire to do so; it is a word which has expressed, and ever will express, the deepest personal experience which a man can pass through in all his life, whether it come gradually or suddenly. No other word has ever taken its place. And yet men are afraid of it; it becomes unpopular in particular times and under particular circumstances. Cannot the larger meaning of the word help us in these personal aspects and their dangers, as we look at them more closely? Cannot the conversion of the world interpret and assist our own conversion? Cannot our interest in the one be made to re-act upon our interest in the other?

The personal aspect of conversion is frightful to many a man. He does not like to say that he is converted. It seems like an assertion of the power and care of self to an unwarranted degree. It speaks of separation in a way for which very few men are prepared. It speaks of turning, and it makes it appear to the man's mind as if he had turned, away from the rest of the world, to the little world within him, for salvation. He does not dare to say that he is converted, because he says that he has never felt that peculiar power which seems to warrant such an assertion. Conversion

stands often in one's life for a particular line of changed conduct : and, good as it may be for himself, he does not dare to proclaim it as a necessity for all ; or even good as it may be for others, he does not see the necessity of it for himself. Pressed by such feeling, our religious phraseology has let the good old word, which Christianity made so full of meaning, drop into obscurity. And yet, as we have said, no expression has been found to take its place, and we can hardly believe that any ever will be found. To turn to God is surely as comprehensive and rich an expression for true human experience as the heart of man can ever desire ; the Bible, which has given it to us, in that has given only another proof of its Divine inspiration.

Does not the mission-work, as a part of the Christian life, bound up with it, and inseparable from it, save this word, which is so characteristic of it, from any such danger ? Conversion, as it is enlarged and applied to all men, is recognized as the turning of each man toward the centre of his life as a man, toward that which belongs to himself and to every other man that is in the world. He sees and respects its processes and modes for himself. The change and variety of those modes in others do not affect the truth, that the great action belongs to all alike. The man bends him-

self to what is needed to be done for his own salvation, he undertakes gladly the special work of reform and labor of love toward his God that belongs to him; but the great word which authorizes all that effort is not exhausted in it. As he hears of the conversion of men everywhere, as that story is told to him, as it was by the returned apostles to the disciples of old, the warrant of all that he is doing for himself becomes stronger and clearer. It is like the happy experience which so often encourages us, as when, with all our personal energy and wisdom, we have labored at our little work, there comes to us the news of one who wanted just our labor to complete his effort, and the sense of our world-wide connection adds to the dignity of all our subsequent efforts.

We never shall know how much the universal element in the mission-work of the Church has helped to interpret the personal message of salvation to the souls of men; nor shall we know how much evil has been accomplished, through the obscuring of that element, in keeping some of the noblest and most unselfish characters from Christian profession. The Church's missionary work boldly asserted, and not apologized for, must attract, rather than repel, men. It gives a reason for the Church's existence which must appeal to the best energies and thoughts of men. If the great uni-

versal idea of missions was more real to the heart of man, should we be quite so much afraid to speak of religion, the great cause of humanity, to each other? When we speak of our hope that we have been converted, or pray for some other that he shall be converted, we mean nothing desirable or noble unless the missionary spirit has filled and enlarged all our conceptions of our relation to God and to our fellow-men.

There is also an intellectual side to the difficulties about conversion. We are asked to admit a power from God to our lives; to give it complete sway; to let it override and obscure all other powers within us; to give up being every thing else, and to become religious men. And then comes the thought that there are other powers from God within us and around us. They may have been wrongly used, and may have done great harm; but, after all, they are from Him, for "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." In ourselves we feel the difficulty, for the very position in life in which God has placed us often seems to involve us in spiritual danger, and yet we cannot leave it. We are asked to unite ourselves to a Church which has the presence of God within it, and yet outside of the Church's action we see manifestations of God which attract us. Are they all to be branded as evil and unproductive? Is the new Christian

force a separative force, declaring that God's former work is a failure, and therefore that a new one has to be introduced? If that is so, how do we know that this new one is not to be a failure also? Perhaps it is better not to be converted, and to stay and to try to work out our salvation with the old forces,—with the human activity and wisdom and uprightness of being, which so often show the marks of God's presence everywhere. Surely no one can blame us for that; and, above all, God cannot. If this is a difficulty which we have felt ourselves or heard stated by others, we can understand that the demand is for an answer as to the relation of this new power of Christ to all the other forces of life. Missions and the missionary spirit give that answer. The word "conversion," in the large field of the word's progress, is seen to mean utilizing of powers, not their destruction. Missionary work is the claiming of the acquired and inherited result of God's training everywhere for Him. The spirit of denial of missions says that there are such results that never can be used for Him, never can be consecrated for His purpose. That spirit makes our Christianity and the results of God's training in other fields antagonistic to each other, when it declares that any nation cannot receive, or does not need, conversion. That was what the narrow Jewish idea

of conversion said : let a man come under the influence of the nation specially selected by God, and he can be converted ; otherwise he cannot be. But, as Paul and Barnabas declared the conversion of the Gentiles, they said, that, though a man had lived in a place where Greek and Roman literature alone had been read, though he were descended from a line of ancestors who had never felt any other influences than those which make rich and glorious the pages of heathen antiquity, he has not gone beyond the reach of God's power. There was no chance for such a thing, for all power which deserved the name was from God. That step which our text records was the opening of the way for that Greek influence in Christian thought and literature, which, combining with the Hebrew elements, has made the religion of Christ one fitted alike for the immovable East and the progressive West.

And it is the same with the missionary work to-day. It goes to nations fixed in one form through centuries of training, in the strongest faith that all that training has come from God ; it is sure that this Gospel, which took the Grecian culture, and made it useful for Him from whom all its power came, will also find out all that is good in every nation, and ingraft it upon the universal religion as the rightful possession of its

great Master. Who knows what features in our great unchangeable faith are to be brought out by Eastern, Mongolian, and African thought? We have not begun to exhaust its resources. To say that we had, would show that we did not believe it to be Divine. The barbarian hordes of the North, converted to Christianity, carried on the process of enlargement which Paul and Barnabas announced as they declared the conversion of the Grecian Gentiles. It is missionary effort which, entering into the nations hitherto unknown, has annexed their peculiar powers to the realms of human achievements, opened their books and literatures to study, and revealed the strange workings of God in their history. It is missionary effort which is not afraid to face any development of human life and feeling, sure that it has some marks of God's power within it.

Religion cannot be narrow while it is missionary. It is always courting new influences, and raising new questions in their very best form, in their practical shape. To know how to deal with a form of thought which by right and inheritance possesses a whole nation, and influences all its action, will surely be more valuable than to manufacture the answer to some speculative doubt that a dreamer has concocted at home. When our best and most active minds among laymen

and clergymen throw themselves into missionary labors and movements more earnestly, we shall all appreciate the infinite resources of our religion better. We shall feel that it calls us away from no true power of God: it seeks rather to find and use them all. It says that all men must be converted at home and abroad, and that a high standard of moral or intellectual life enhances rather than diminishes the necessity of the action; because conversion is bringing back to the sway of God every good power, either of heart or mind, which He has implanted in his creature, man. Be missionary Christians, and we cannot help being bold and broad Christians in all our personal experiences.

But difficulties as to conversion lie in a very different direction for the great multitude of men. They arise from the pressure of material interests. Men are asked, in conversion, to turn from the earth to heaven, from man to God, and to believe and assert that spiritual things are the ones that make the most important and imperative demands; and all the time, around them are material necessities calling for attention, and bodily duties calling for action. The search after the mere support for daily life, the struggle to keep themselves abreast of a swiftly moving world, seem to demand all their energies. How can they be expected to deal

with spiritual things under such circumstances? Before that can be done, it must be seen that there is some connection between all these material things and the power of God, so that due attention to one is not the annihilation of the other. Turning to God must be seen to be only a closer turning to the right use of the world, which God has given.

The connection of God and the material world through nature does not come close enough to man's own mind and heart to be long remembered. Men work for bread, and they are forever forgetting that that bread never could have been theirs without God's sunshine; they dig for gold and silver, and will not think that those things lie ready for their use, only because God's laws stored them up ages ago. And so a man's property, and the food that he eats, is often more Divine than the man himself. He himself, his life and activity, form a great prison-house, into which things of God's making are carried, losing all their Divine significance by reason of his want of Divine knowledge; and then the man himself says that these things, which he is keeping all the time from their Master, are preventing him from being God's servant. There can be no more effective way of breaking in on this vicious circle than by declaring that the gold and the silver, the

materials of the earth, are the Lord's, and claiming them as such. As the missionary cause says to men, "Give us of your means, and we will make it into Christians," it forever declares to those men that it is not the world that keeps them from being Christians, but their own selfish desires. It breaks down the lie, that any thing which God has given is to take our responsibility from us.

Men say that they are tired of the continual begging for missionary causes ; it is said to sound mercenary, and to seem to put the souls of men at a money value. But is it not a witness to a conversion of forces which may well teach all modern research that there is something beyond the mere physical powers which they are studying with so much success? One material form succeeds another in their experiments. Here a material form, sanctified by a spiritual force, turns into the ripened character of a converted man ; and then it re-acts again : the converted man makes the earth richer, works with a wisdom and diligence which he did not have before, and sends back to the very land from which the gold for his conversion came, riches which far surpass any thing which was given to the treasury of the Lord. Interaction of material and spiritual forces, — that is something which Christian missions have ever taught, but which they are teaching to-day with more point

and illustration than ever before, because of the closer connection of all parts of the world. It is a lesson which we need in all our life, that we may learn that there is no opposition between our daily action and our religious hope; that they came from the same God, and work to the same end. How can we learn it better than by having a true and vital connection with this great work, which, on a larger scale than any of our individual lives, teaches us the unity of all God's action wherever His hand is to be found? What you give will teach you more of the power of what you have. What is given to convert the heathen or your sinning brother, will forever say that your substance, from which that little portion was broken off, must not stand in the way of the true home missions in your own heart, but must convert you by turning your life, more and more fully in thankfulness, to the God from whom it came.

"Set at liberty imprisoned angels" was the command of King John, as he sent his messenger to spread throughout the country pieces of old English currency stamped with the figure of Michael and the dragon. Would not the spread of the true missionary spirit give a new meaning to the phrase, as men learned that their substance, the material gifts of God, need not be demons of

destruction, as they are too often to those who possess them? But, seen in the right light, they are angels of salvation to ourselves and to others; imprisoned by lives of selfishness and low motive, but set free to fly on God's errands, as they were used for the conversion, and never the destruction, of souls. All expenditure, all use of this earth, would be blessed by such an emancipation.

The man who does not believe in Christian missions is an anachronism; he is behind the times. He is living in a world which has learned the oneness of the race, and the value of unity and sympathy. He is a citizen of a country that sends a broad invitation to the world, and believes that men of all different antecedents and races can be welded into one homogeneous mass, and then in his own heart he draws back, and makes the most important interest of his life one that belongs to himself alone; he is living in a time full of philanthropic action, and then he makes his religion, from which the spirit of that action has been learned, as selfish and narrow as possible. To strive for, and to anticipate with joy, the conversion of the whole world, must be the function of every man who rejoices in the power which, through Christ, is given unto him of turning to God.

XVIII.

THE ADVENT MESSAGE.

"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." — AMOS iv. 12.

THESE words contain the two elements of all Advent thoughts, — the promise of a coming, and the exhortation to prepare for that coming. That they were uttered many years before the birth of that great Advent character, John the Baptist, and that they are found in a different part of the Bible from that which usually furnishes us with Advent lessons, are facts which declare, what is too often overlooked, that the Advent spirit is a constant one in the Bible, and one which it would make constant in all life. The one great difference between Christianity and all other forms of life and thought is, that the former has an Advent to it, and that the latter have not. Christ taught men to look forward; and wherever the spirit of Christ prevails on the pages of the Bible, in the law, the prophets, the Gospels, or the Epistles, there is that forward look toward a well-marked future. But in other life there is no such

definite spirit of anticipation. In the early days of life, which are its purest, its brightest, and its best, such a spirit does, indeed, prevail ; the child's expectation and the youth's ambition are among the best treasures which life has to give us. But after them comes the process of settling down, satisfied, or necessarily limited, with what life has given us ; the future is made a matter of empty speculation or of wild dreaming. The plans of those who delight to consider themselves progressive men, are more often destructive than constructive, in marked contrast to the Bible, which, in all its parts, seems to know clearly what it desires to produce. Christ taught men that God was all about their lives ; wherever they might go, they were to meet Him ; they could not escape Him ; in Him they lived and moved and had their being. And, therefore, there was always a prospect of meeting Him ; all progress, either conscious or unconscious, voluntary or compulsory, could be defined as God and man meeting together. Christianity rejoices in this idea, because one element of its conception of both God and man is, that they belong together ; man was made by God that they might be together. But no wonder, that, in all the ordinary forms of human life, the thought of this meeting is pushed aside, or postponed until a distant and vague season, for it has no place in the

conception of life which belongs to most men. To them the life of men is happiest away from God; only when life is done, and it is time for it to close, is it absorbed back into that great source from which it came. If an Advent season can help us to this better idea of our relation to God, and oppose that false one which all the world endeavors to give us, it will show its real meaning and value. To some of its lessons of preparation for meeting our God, we turn our attention.

There is always a generation that is growing up, preparing for the world, as we say. The world has never been without such a class, — the young, the vigorous, the sanguine, — and it never will be; and it is one whose position and character tell very plainly the nature of the world's ideal. What is this for which they are preparing? What do they themselves consider it to be? and what do others, whose experience is greater, tell them it is? Personal gain and pleasure will demand one kind of preparation, and it is that preparation alone which the ideal, that is held up, too often incites. Mental acuteness, wide knowledge, personal attractions, worldly advantages, all in varying degrees go toward the making-up of such preparation; and every facility for them is eagerly sought, and the field of their exercise anxiously anticipated.

“Prepare to meet thy God” presents a very dif-

ferent ideal. It supposes that the world of men and women, of events and circumstances, was made and is controlled by God. He is in it; behind all its more evident aspects He exists as a great power which is unlimited in its plans, and unmeasured in its force. Into such a world we are all called to enter; and for preparation toward such a destiny are needed spiritual acquirements, — the power of patience and self-denial, the accurate perception of what is for, and what is against, God's glory, the possession of firm principle and courageous faith to resist the wrong and to assist the good. How many men have failed in the world for want of just those things! The whole moral aspect of life was obscured to them; they did not know that they were going to meet God, with His stern demands and far-reaching plans. Their eyes were fixed only upon their brethren, — upon their ambitions and their desires, so similar to their own; and into the contest concerning all such things they were ready to enter. And whether they have been successful, or not, in that direction, matters not; they were not prepared to meet their God. The demands which a world ruled by Him placed upon them were too great. This conception of the world was too great for the puny training which they had received. They succumbed to temptation; they lost their faith.

The Advent message brings back the true ideal; it says, "Awake out of sleep. Put off the works of darkness; put on the armor of light." Whether we are just entering the world, or whether this Advent season finds us in the midst of it, passing from one experience to another, its message is, "Before us is God." For destruction or for salvation, according to our preparation, He is there. Could we want a greater message, one more full of dignity and promise? Is it not worth hearing young men and women, who are looking forward to many years of activity and joy? Do not treat life as an earthly and insignificant thing; but at every step be sure that there is present the power of God, demanding our most complete preparation for what it lays upon us. The preparation for such daily meetings with God is a wide one. It neglects none of the ordinary preparations, in body, mind, or spirit, for every emergency requiring wisdom and power; it adds to that, it crowns it all, with that preparation of spirit trained by intercourse with God Himself, in the closet, in the church, by prayer, and by meditation, that we may be able to recognize His coming, and to do His will.

There is what is called the progress of the world. Looked at in itself, it is a strange and confused thing. It is like the progress of the ocean, — full of currents, tides, advancing and re-

treating waves. Ideas, like fashions, rise and fall, come and go ; inventions are alternately applauded and ridiculed ; the pendulum of opinion is ever swinging, now in one direction and again in another. Principles of action seem at first unlimited in their beneficence, and then are evident as needing all the restraint which can be given them. Is there a great point, toward which all these changes are carrying the world ? We see a progress, but toward what does it point ? The world says that it does not know ; it believes in going forward, but cannot say where the end is to be. The revelation of Christ says that this movement is toward the complete revelation of God's will, until at length the world has met its God. And for that great meeting, all the progress of the world is to be a preparation : such a principle as that must affect all action ; it will make it impossible to believe that the project or ideal of any one particular time contains all the truth, or is worthy of the unlimited homage, of a world that is expecting to meet its God. There would be a readiness to look in every direction for the elements of that kingdom, which, if it is to come, must be as great as God Himself ; all nations, all ages, would be found to have something to contribute to its power and welfare ; no knowledge in any direction would be despised ; there could be

no discouragement at seeming failures, at unfortunate experiments, at temporary reverses, for often they would be found to contribute most largely to final success. There would be a greater desire to submit all plans to the revision and purification of God's Spirit, and to be taught of Him in all that concerns the great future that is to be. Material progress would always be made subordinate to spiritual growth.

That is the result of believing in the coming of the Lord. It is as far as possible from the dogmatic utterances and strained interpretations of what we have been apt to identify with all anticipation of the coming of the Lord. It is something which calls for preparation, and not for definition. That picture of a judgment-day, when the books shall be opened, and the world shall recognize its consummation, is a necessity of human thought. Its details of description may have been so closely identified with that picture of the destruction of Jerusalem, and with the features of a time of disorder in the world, that we may be able to find little in them to appeal to our modes of thought and action; but the idea becomes more valuable and necessary every day, as, in the increasing clearness of historical light, the rise and fall of nations become evident, as no great plan is seen to exist without a purpose, and

as an end and consummation are understood to belong to all wise action. "Prepare to meet thy God" is a command which, when we have once heard it clearly in Christian revelation, can be heard re-echoed from all the surrounding points of human life. It is a voice which comes from heaven; but earth takes it up, and prolongs it, and repeats it. And, instead of alarming us, this word, if rightly understood, if the God of whom it speaks is seen to be our Father, ought to make us more confident and active and faithful in every hope for the future.

There is one more aspect of these words, and perhaps it is the one in which they have gained their greatest familiarity, — that in which they relate to death. As soon as a man is born into this world, he begins to act as if this were his home, and as if he had left God forever. In the most common-sense way he begins to accustom himself to his surroundings. His body grows; his surroundings claim his attention; he learns the ways of this his new home, and gives himself to it more and more. If successful in life, as years go on he lays hold upon all that is attractive; if unsuccessful, he gradually becomes identified with the more repulsive sides of earthly existence, till at length his appearance suggests any thing but spiritual belongings. At any time in such careers

one who knew nothing of the nature of man's existence would suppose that man and the earth were becoming so associated that it would be impossible to separate them. And yet all the time the man is marching toward a destiny outside of the body; it is really God toward whom he is going. When the proper moment comes, the body shows that it has no affection for that soul: it lets it go, and returns to its sister-earth; and the spirit returns to God, who gave it. At that moment the real tendency of life shows itself; its real belongings are manifested. The word comes, "Arise and depart hence, for this is not your home."

When the religion of the Bible brings that moment into prominence, it is often thought that it is a special foe to the happiness of life; when a Christian declares that the life in the body is not the first thing in his estimation, but the eternal life of the soul is, he is generally supposed to be saying something extremely unnatural, if not disagreeable. But it is only a fact of all experience, of all ages, that is thus expressed. Religion did not make the grave: it only found it, and declared how it could be received; it only pointed out to men, that, much as they might cling to the things of this earth, they could not continue to do so forever, because the things of this earth refused the association. And so, sooner or later, for all, the

cry is heard, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh : go ye forth to meet Him." It is a cry which wise and foolish virgins hear alike ; it is a cry which is heard in nature, even where it is not heard in the Gospel. Something besides earth claims us ; we must go forth to meet it. It is the Gospel which says, "Prepare to meet thy God." Let that day not come upon you unawares, as a thief in the night ; refuse to be snared by and identified with that bodily life, which must fail you ; live by the power of Him who came from heaven, and took flesh upon Him, only that by that life in the flesh He might do the will of His Father, and call men back to Him.

Such a word as that draws inspiration out of a clear-sighted acknowledgment of that dark fact of death, to which most men are obliged to shut their eyes, for fear it should unnerve and weaken them. It looks upon it, not only with calm resignation, but with a spirit of earnest and active preparation for a great fact, which produces new power at every step. Yes, there is sternness to these words ; there was when Amos first uttered them to the wicked and debased kingdom of Israel. But when their sternness is heeded, when they move to a true appreciation of our relation to God, then, like God's storms everywhere, they purify our skies, they soften and enrich the soil of our lives, they

are the forerunners of rich fruits and fragrant flowers.

And now that we have seen, in so many ways, the nature of Christ's Advent message, and its relation to our life on every side, we can appreciate how full in its meaning, how large in its influence, was that great first coming. God has come to the world in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Once the aspirations of prophetic men, the lives of saints and heroes, found their fulfilment in His appearing; the lines of historical development, running through many strange experiences, converged in His life. The model of a life living in the world but belonging to the Father, was perfect in His incarnation; the dark facts of poverty, suffering, death, and the grave were by Him made the means of a glorious redemption. All that is a promise of what can be, a pledge of what shall be. The Advent hope is no dream: it is a reality. In that assurance we are to live. Go out to meet this great Bridegroom, greet Him with confidence, follow Him with joy, and you are on Advent paths. If we all did that, what a Christian year it would be! what a step of progress it would be toward the great Advent! what an era it would mark in the history of our lives, of the community, yes, of the world! Sin would be rebuked, the world would be told to be less clamorous in its demands,

and God would be everywhere exalted ; churches would be filled, because men would be anxious to go wherever they thought they could find God ; homes would be purified, that they might be fit places for His dwelling. Everywhere the note of preparation would be heard, telling of joyful activity in anticipation of the great day of the Lord. As those around us were called to meet Him on the other side of the stream, we who remained would press forward only the more joyfully and confidently to that great consummation, when the Lord shall indeed come, with all His saints. That is the life which will break upon us, when in our hearts we all shall hear and obey that truest word of all human existence, "Prepare to meet thy God."

XIX.

A CHRISTMAS SERMON.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." — JOHN
i. 14.

CHRISTMAS is a popular day, one which all people appreciate, no matter how slight their religious thought, or superficial their religious knowledge. But that fact makes it no less needful that we should be assured of the greatness and strength of the foundation on which the day rests. With more, and not less, gratitude and wonder we receive and use the light of the sun, now that we know how great is the distance from which it comes, how important, as the centre of the universe, is the body which sends it to us, and how deep is the astronomical knowledge which is drawn from its study. The brightness in which we rejoice every day is no mere passing or fitful light : it is one whose destruction can only come as we at the same time perish. And so with joy and gratitude we read these words of the Christmas message ; they add to the brightness of the day, and do not diminish it by the depths of mysterious

knowledge which they open. We do not pretend that we can understand all which they express; we, who cannot comprehend or explain all the depths of feeling which such a day as Christmas opens in the human heart, cannot answer all the questions of our minds as they contemplate God's action, which results in the establishment of such a universal day. But the words recording the action speak to our hearts of the permanence and greatness of the day. They tell us that it has foundations beyond any thing that we can see; that behind its celebration is all the power of God; that it will last as long as He is what He is; and that only the destruction of God, which must also involve the destruction of His child, man, can bring to an end the observance of such a day as this. God's action, God's very nature, are involved in it. Through all our enjoyment of its human delights runs the sustaining thought of its Divine aspects. And so we are encouraged to look more closely at the statement of the action of God which gave us Christmas, and to see its natural connection with some of the special points of its celebration.

"The *Word* was made flesh." We are told that expression is so valuable a characteristic of God's being, that one of the very persons of the Godhead is called "the Word." We can hardly be sur-

prised at this, for is there a gift that deserves to be called Divine more than that of expression? and, therefore, can there be a characteristic more significant of the Divine nature? It is by the power of expression quite as much as that of thought, that man rises above the animals, even as the animals excel the plants. The silence of the vegetable passes into the sounds of the animal; it passes upward into the speech of man; it leads us, as we look to our Father in heaven, to ask for "the Word of God." No gift like that of expression makes a man valuable and powerful with his fellow-men. It is one which uses not the tongue only; but the face, the hand, and the form are all influenced by it, and made its servants. The mute Miltons are inglorious, and lie in the country churchyard; the great singer lives from generation to generation. The philosopher sneers and frets at the influence of the orator; the common man reads the words of wisdom, and says, "I knew that, if I had only had the power to say it." Men of great resources are lost to the world, because they cannot bring out their treasures; and we look with eager anticipation to another world, where the stores acquired here shall be made available by new powers and under new conditions. For men, in whose lives such facts exist, no God but one who had the power of expression would

ever be suitable. God's wisdom, God's power, God's knowledge, would not answer. He is not the God of mankind until He is also the Word. That fact gives life and warmth to God's existence. It is like the touch of the match to the great pile of fuel, with its stored-up powers of light and heat. He is no longer a great mysterious one at a distance, for He has that power which brings every thing near; He has it in its perfection. Its manifestation is not confined to the forms of men's words, any more than the sounds of the animal kingdom suit our purposes. We do not picture Him as an eloquent Mercury or as a thundering Jove, but we know and declare that He is the Word of God.

God can speak, can express Himself, — that is the joyful fact of Christmas Day. Does it not find expression in the celebration of the day? The songs, expression of words and sounds; the greens, expression of symbols; the gifts, expression of action; the light on the faces of children; the hurrying steps; the cheerful sounds, — all of these give it its character: it is a great open day. The word "merry" seems to tell of that characteristic of open, evident action; we hear its sounds, and see its sights. To many it seems even a dangerous characteristic, as ministering to superficiality and frivolity. And I know not how we

can save it from such dangers, except by remembering the deep source whence all expression comes, and feeling, under the merry glancing of the sun on the surface of our life to-day, the deep fact that God is the Word, and therefore that we His children can tell all our feelings forth in many ways. He presents Himself to-day as a God who can and will speak to us at all times. He sanctifies the channels of expression, that through them He may flow to us, and we may reach each other. It is a fact that would spread the influence of Christmas through all the year. Shall the hand which helps to-day, injure to-morrow? Shall the tongue that blesses to-day, curse to-morrow? Shall the sympathy that warms to-day, be found a frozen reserve to-morrow? Whether our eyes see this day in a Divine or a human light, whether we are thinking of our relation to others or to God, the Divineness of the day's action calls for its continuance and influence through all our life. More words of sympathy, more acts of helpfulness, more realization of God's constant desire to be with us, — those are things most necessary for life; and they come to us through Christmas' declaration of Christ, the Word of God.

Expression shows its right to be a characteristic of Deity in nothing more than in its trans-

forming and utilizing power. It touches the most commonplace materials, and at once they are made new things. The artist transforms the clay, the architect piles together the stones, the orator draws in and exhales the air, and the inspiration of expression in each makes of those substances results which live long. We seem to understand the declaration that all things were made by the Word. We feel that that same desire and necessity of expression, working in connection with the wonderful attributes of Deity, could not result in any thing less than this wonderful universe of ours, where, out of such unpromising materials, so much is made.

And so, when we look for the highest work of that Word of God, we turn to that material which is capable at once of the highest exaltation and of the greatest degradation. It is this flesh of ours. There is where the Greeks, the people most sensitive to earthly beauty of all nations of the earth, found the greatest possibility of its existence. It was the human form which they exercised, studied, and depicted. And it is in the degraded and besotted specimens of humanity which we meet, that all which is repulsive and inharmonious seems most dreadfully exhibited. The flesh is the means of the noblest activities and of the most debasing vices. Beauty charms

and beauty insnares. The feeling of health is the most exhilarating and sustaining: it is the disease of the flesh that breaks the spirit, and weakens action. The advent of the soul of the child to the fleshly tabernacle is the era of rejoicing: the departure from the flesh is dreaded and avoided. Who shall rightly utilize this flesh, so contradictory and yet so noble a medium? What does it matter if God express Himself in every way, — by nature, by thought, by feeling, — if this most important department never feels His presence? And so “the Word is made flesh” is a sound full of hope and rejoicing. It declares the reality and actual working of God’s expression. He can take flesh; He recognizes the possibilities of this life of ours, and shows Himself in it. Henceforth let no man despair: there is not a low or degraded fact of life to which God cannot speak, and which will not be transformed by that word. That fleshly life which began on Christmas Day, not one of glory as the earth views it, not trying to gild and ornament the outward flesh, as so many of us do, but rather showing what a vehicle flesh can become, tells the story of a new creation. God can use every thing. Here is the bond between our two great Christian festivals. The work of Christmas, bringing Christ to flesh, is only carried on

and perfected as that same Christ raises the decaying body to its position of a resurrection body.

But to-day we rejoice that all our work has God in it. We see the great promise of the future for Christ and in us. Men do their little work on nature's domain, but they recognize that they do not begin to be the most important workers in that domain; they know that behind all they do is the regularity of nature's laws, on which they absolutely depend, and in a more or less definite way they recognize God, and are obedient men. But, with regard to the affairs of human existence and of their own lives, it seems as if the weight rested on their own shoulders. And therefore, forgetting God, and giving themselves to it, they fall into sin. Pride, selfishness, indulgence, — all enter as we forget that God can express Himself in lives of flesh. And here is the proof that He can do so. The Word made flesh tells us that wherever there is flesh, there should be the Word of God in its clearest, purest, highest state. God, who spoke through that flesh, is to speak through all flesh. That incarnate Son of God carries us back to the first charter of all human life, that it was made in the image of God, and we too in all our earthly lives are told that we can and must be the sons of God. And our

celebration of this day and season, as in so many points it brings Divine and human, heavenly and earthly, things together, combining religious and social features, is not at fault; much more, is not profane. It is carrying out the thought of the day's great fact. It is attempting to realize what all life ought to realize every day, — that humanity in all its earthly actions can be and ought to be the highest expression of the will of God. The day, by its pure and unselfish joy, rebukes our ordinary life, and sends us back to the incarnate Son of God to learn the means by which to do away with our sin, and live as we should in all the relations of this fleshly existence.

But there are other modes of expression more intangible than the actions of the flesh. They are to be found in the associations of life. They are invisible to the ordinary observer, and can hardly be described by those who know them. We are pouring out our lives to those around us — in affection and influence and inspiration — in ways which they and we do not appreciate; but, as we sum up our labors, often there comes to us the solemn fact, that certain lives are going their way of glory or disgrace because we placed them on that path. It is the most effective, it is the deepest, mode of expression, — influence by personal contact with others. And we are not surprised,

therefore, that a disciple who had stood so near Christ as St. John had, and had felt so strongly the influence of all that He said and did, should have put on a level with the taking of flesh, the life in that flesh. The story was not complete without that: "He dwelt among us." The ministry of that Word was in all the associations of childhood, youth, and manhood; the expression of the Divine nature was not only in His being here in the flesh, but in His being what He was when He was here.

We rejoice to-day over the Babe in the cradle, not only because He was born, but because we see the life then begun, stretching forward in all that we know was to come in its dwelling among men. Already we see the miracles, and hear the parables; we know the facts of the wondrous life and death. He is to our eyes on the mount of the beatitudes and on the mount of Calvary, speaking on one, suffering on the other. Our rejoicings over the birth of the ordinary infant are based on what we know and hope of men's lives in general: our rejoicings over this life are from what we know of this life in itself, of all it did, and of all it does to-day. We see the dwelling with men, which began on that day, continuing not only over the extent of those thirty-three years, but, through the presence of the Spirit, lasting through all time.

We seem to hear from those infant lips the words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." We who have felt the delight of such dwelling with us of human friends, we who know what it is to have our houses filled with those who bless us by their presence, can feel how deep is the joy of such a day. The universal Friend is present. The fact of the Divine Word is universal and eternal. We cannot recount its blessings. We may travel through all life, and place our finger on all we have or enjoy, but that will not tell the story. We have Him, for consolation, for support, for encouragement, for love.

The invisible is more than the visible, the unknown greater than the known. In that sense Christmas Day is inexhaustible. Its blessings flow into our lives by day and by night; we store up treasures from it, whose true value will not be known for long years to come. God's power of expression brings Him into association with men, and there is really no more to be said. He could not give more to us than Himself, and He could not get nearer to us without annihilating Himself and us. And yet we cannot imagine that that Divine power of expression, when once we are convinced of its existence, could stop short of that richest mode of action. It is no wonder that association with each other takes this day as the one

in which it is to show itself in its purest and best form, and that we try to tell each other that constantly, beneath all our material interests, which impose such peremptory demands upon our lives, there is that richest and best fact, that we are in each other's presence, that we are able to get at each other's lives, and know each other personally. For on the existence of that fact depends the proof of our being able to know our God as He should be known. The side of warm and loving interest in each other on this day can never cease. It of right belongs here, and it will show itself while the human heart knows its best tendencies. By all the power of association within us we are to desire, and through the fact of to-day's celebration we can secure, the dwelling of our Lord God.

As, in his Revelation, John saw the armies of the living God enter into heaven, their battles all over, their conquests gained, at their head, on the white horse, was "the Word of God." He was their leader: in Him they had gained the victory. Is it not so? What can we do if God is not with us? What word is good if God's Word be not in it? How can we men carry through the great causes which rest upon us as children of our Father in heaven, unless that Father is as near as is this life of the flesh, is as much our support as is the association of our brethren? That God is Emmanuel,

that the Son of God is the Word of God, is a cause of rejoicing which may well fill our hearts with deepest gladness and highest anticipations. Nothing can surpass it; no day can be brighter than the one that brings it. Like the leader of an army, it marshals the other days of the year; it gives them strength and encouragement now, it will give them victory hereafter.

XX.

CHRIST'S FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

"And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him." — MATTHEW ii. 13.

THE flight into Egypt is not a portion of Christ's life that we mention frequently, or perhaps even think of very often. It comes as an uncomfortably dark incident just after the glories of Christmas and Epiphany, and it seems to us as if it were not necessary that the element of persecution in Christ's life should show itself so soon; but we know that there must have been a purpose in it, for nothing in that wonderful life took place by accident. It must have been hard for Joseph to hear such a message just after the adoration of the shepherds and the visit of the magi had made him feel the greatness of the Child who was under his care and protection. But he had to obey the Lord, he had to go into Egypt; and he arose and did it without murmuring. All

the past glories only convinced him more fully that it was his duty to follow God's leading, and to go down into Egypt.

Even the glories of the life of the Son of God could not shine without intermission on this earth. Vicissitude is not the fate of low or wicked things alone: it belongs to every thing. Christ took it as a portion of humanity's lot. "Man being in honor abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish." That is true of man always; it belongs to him on his animal side, which triumphed when man sinned: and every earthly manifestation of honor may be expected to be transient, when even the innocent Son of God, with all the charms of infancy on Him, was allowed to remain unmolested for so short a time.

But such a lesson of the weakness of humanity it was not necessary for Christ to teach us: that is written all about us only too plainly. Christ came for salvation: He came to show us how to find our way out of dark things, and not merely to make us know that they are dark; He came to convict us of sin, but He came also to redeem us from sin. And so, if the flight into Egypt shows us the transitory character of glory, we may be sure that it also will teach us what is the true foundation of glory, and how it may really be preserved amid all vicissitudes.

And we find, therefore, running all through this short story, as St. Matthew gives it to us, the feature of God's special protection. The angel of the Lord informs Joseph of a danger of which he otherwise would not have known. He designates the place of flight. Joseph is to remain there until God calls him. And he finally returns at God's word, and, under His warning, turns aside and dwells in Nazareth. The whole event, in all its particulars, is pointed out to be the fulfilment of prophecy, and thus to be something which was connected with God's special knowledge. In this way the event brings before us the greatness of Christ in a very striking light. To the world He was nothing when the flight had taken place. Perhaps the shepherds felt ashamed of their story and of their vision when they heard that the Babe, of whom they had told so loudly, had fled by night. But that very flight had the power of God in it; it was the result of God's loving care. It had in it all that had given any meaning to the angels' song or the wise men's gifts. They had value, as bearing witness to God's plans for that Babe. They signified that in Him God intended that peace should come upon the earth, and that distant kings and nations should be brought to the knowledge of the true God. But the humble procession into Egypt spoke equally of God's purposes and

care, of the fact that that Babe was His only-begotten Son; and therefore it, too, was great to His eyes.

Let that fact of being God's Son be the basis of all honor, and it abides; it exists in a humble flight, in a sorrowful defeat, as well as in a glorious triumph; in bereavement as well as in blessing. Boast not of achievements, of events, of passing actions; but put your trust in character, in true relation to God, and then confidence continues at all times. Rejoice in success and happiness, rejoice in a good deed done; but do not trust in it or in its glory: that is very transient; it goes no farther than itself. But rejoice in that from which it comes, in God's presence and care, and you have a flower that never shall fade.

Christ went down into Egypt that the prophecy might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." And God always calls His sons out of Egypt, even if He seems to be almost cruel at first in sending them down there. Others go down there, and never return: His sons, those who are His, come back. A mother looks at the innocence of her child; it is as sweet as the song of the angels which had just come from heaven. Must that innocence fade? Must it go down into the world's Egypt, and be a fugitive, hiding itself from hostile powers that would kill it? Must that boy,

who now talks so plainly and simply of God, go out, and be exposed to the influences of impure and selfish men? She keeps the boy close to her; she dreads to let him go forth; she wonders what the end of it can be. Or, some good thought is in our heart as we are brought near to the influences of God's grace somewhere in life. How we long to keep it, as it visits us in some moment of God's nearness! Must it flee into a wicked and godless Egypt of worldly life, and be lost? Surely there is a way to avoid any such danger. "Out of Egypt have I called my son." If that childish innocence, if that good thought, are merely pleasing as incidents, as attainments, well may we look for them to be transitory. If we would preserve them, we must make that child feel its nearness to God as His child; we must make that good thought or desire part of a life which feels its duty to Him as Christ's servant. We must give to them the true foundation, which shall continue. Then let them go. God sends them into Egypt, God will bring them out again. How many souls have lost their purity of childhood because they did not see that it was only valuable as it was a pledge of God's care and love, and did not, before it vanished, become servants of Christ, who came to make us sons of God! How many good thoughts have come to nothing because they had

no root in themselves, because we did not see the necessity of giving them a real living power by our being made sons of God! Into Egypt we all must go; we cannot live among angels' songs and Epiphany glories forever. Sin and temptation, sorrow and darkness, soon succeed happiness and goodness. Christ asks us to go, as He did, as sons of God, to go in obedience and submission to Him who loves us and watches over us.

There is great interest and significance in the fact that Jesus Christ fled into Egypt. Egypt was always closely connected with the people of Israel. All through the Old Testament it fills a sort of counterplace to Israel in God's dealings. First, there was the connection of Abraham and Joseph and Jacob with Pharaoh, then there was the captivity in Egypt, and the subsequent flight thence under Moses. Solomon married an Egyptian wife when the relations of Israel with foreign nations were beginning to grow more intimate. In the later days of the kingdom, in the lifetime of the great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the people were inclined to defend themselves by trusting to Egypt's help rather than by relying on God. After the return from the captivity, when Alexander founded Alexandria, there was a large colony of Jews in the new city, and a school of Jewish philosophers grew up there. It was there

that the Old Testament was first translated into Greek, and connection between Egypt and Palestine was ever after actively maintained. It was to that Hebrew colony in Egypt, probably, that Christ was taken. He was safe there, because no one cared about Him. They were not on the lookout for the Messiah; they were busy with their philosophies or their traffic: and no vision of angels appeared to them, no wise men would come there to find the fulfilment of a prophecy. The jealousy of Herod or of the Pharisees would never think of going to Alexandria to search for the infant Saviour, and they could trust the atmosphere of that place to stifle the breath of any such life, without help from them; and the people of that city could not trouble about a man and his wife and little child, who came to dwell there, or examine into their past history. Christ was safe, but it was a strange alternative.

He was fleeing from His own people, where He should have been joyfully welcomed as the fulfilment of the nation's hopes. A cruel king, a degraded priesthood, a nation given up to formalism, were all that He could find to receive Him. The people were religious, but their religion was narrow, intolerant, and petty. It never asked after God; it was of the earth, earthy: and there was no chance for Jesus Christ to get a foothold in

such a religion as that. It is a warning to our religious thoughts, to us who live in the light of religious privilege and knowledge. Keep religion pure, keep it high and lofty and spiritual. Never be satisfied with any other idea of it. Be ready to receive God in it, and let it be a fit place for God to dwell in. It should be a promised land, a land of rest to the weary, and of welcome to the Messiah ; it should have but one idea, — to make men know God. No ecclesiastical correctness, no spirit of philanthropy, no formal purity, no doctrinal rigor, can take the place of that. Christ may be driven from us, if that is all He finds ; or, at best, He will be the Master only of a small band of humble followers. Strangers shall supplant those who should know Him ; “ they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God,” and the children of the kingdom be cast out. Use privileges and opportunities rightly ; that is a lesson running all through the history of Christ and His relation to Israel.

But here there is a very prominent element of comparison in this incident of the flight into Egypt. Does some one outside of religious life deride the way in which Christ is treated and received by religious men ? does he say the Christ is safer outside of the Church than He is in it ? does he say

that he does not despise Christ? that he does nothing to injure Him, whereas He often receives wounds in the very house of His friends? But does Christ amount to any thing at all with such a man? Jesus was not persecuted in Egypt, but He amounted to nothing there; we hear of no regard that He received. He was like every other babe; He could do no more, and, in comparison with the philosophies and the business around, was not worth mention. Oh, no! Egypt was worse than Palestine. There were shepherds, there was a Holy Family, there were to be disciples, in Palestine; but there was no material for such in Egypt. Deadness is an enemy to Christ. Absorption in other things, respect to Christ because His claims are not worth consideration, — that is the Egyptian spirit; and it is all around us. It must be broken up wherever it crusts over our hearts. Christ cannot penetrate it. You recall the recent picture of a French artist of the flight into Egypt. As the Holy Family rests in the stillness of the Eastern night, the Virgin, with her child, has found repose in the arms of the sphinx; and the old religion of an unspiritual people thus rescues for a moment the infant power which, in the time to come, is to leave it desolate, the sight of a few curious travellers. Like the stony arms of that Egyptian figure is the reception, by many a man, of Christ.

It has no warmth, it opens no soul to His influence, it lets Him go, and remains the same in its earthly views and interests.

Eastern astrologers travelled a long way to find Jesus and worship Him. But when Jesus travelled a long way to Alexandrian philosophy, it had nothing to say to Him. Say something, think something, about this Saviour, about your relation to God. Who knows how many times He has been near you, and yet done nothing for you, because you cared nothing for Him? If Christ had to flee from Bethlehem, He also had to leave Egypt; and He never returned there again. Defective religion is bad, but let cold worldliness beware lest it is worse. Back and forth, from one to the other Christ passes. The danger is a double one. We must guard against both. We must have pure religion; yes, but to have religion at all, we must feel that there are things above this world, and break away from our deadness, whether of worldly life or of philosophy, which says that Christ is nothing important, and that a spiritual message has no bearing for us.

After the death of Herod, Jesus returned from Egypt. But it was not to go back to Bethlehem. He turns aside to Nazareth, a place which, for some reason, was looked upon contemptuously, and which gave to Jesus His name of the Naza-

rene. The Gospel writer says that this also was a fulfilment of prophecy, and was meant to signify the humility and lowliness of character which the Saviour of the world was to bear. Bethlehem was the birthplace of David, and sacred memories clustered around it. Prophecy had designated it as the birthplace of the Messiah; and to be born there was, of itself, evidence in favor of one claiming to be the Christ. And yet Jesus never referred to that fact of His nativity in the city of David; He never tried to free Himself from the stain of being a Nazarene. Most willingly, through all His life, He carried that mark of humility, which was a part of the flight into Egypt.

In this view, that flight never departed from His life. If it was humiliating to go to Egypt after all the glories of the nativity and Epiphany, it was a part of the same humiliation that He should be known all His life as coming from Nazareth, and not from Bethlehem. And yet Nazareth was a better place for Christ. Bethlehem was a remote country village, relying on past glories. Nazareth was a bustling Galilean town, near to the most fertile and populous parts of the country, receiving influences from all that went on in that strangely mixed population. There was more life around it, and it was life that Christ wanted to reach. There was no air of aristocratic respecta-

bility and seclusion about it, but there was all the activity of a near approach to the modern and present lives of men. It was a better place in which to learn men's wants and to minister to them. To such a place Jesus turned aside when He came back from Egypt, and we can well understand the new character that would be impressed upon His thoughts while living there as a boy.

Humiliation and nearness to men, those two things were the outcome of the flight into Egypt for that great life. God called His Son out of Egypt, and these were the things that He brought with Him. Can we not understand it all? Our religious feelings are happy and bright; they are confident in all that is to come. And then comes the oppression of temptation or the defeat of sin: we are made to go into Egypt. And, when we come back, we are not the same: we are humbled. Religion is no longer clothed with glory alone: we have learned its difficulties; we know the meaning of sin. We cannot rely upon beautiful services or upon religious pedigree: religion is the saving of the sinning soul by Christ. We ask no higher definition of it; we hardly dare to dwell upon its glorious features, for fear men will be misled by them, and become mere ritualists or ecclesiastical pedants. We are content to be called Nazarenes, sinners, if only God can be exalted.

And then every such experience tells us of the practicalness of our religion. We must get it near to men ; we must bring it out where it can come in contact with the world. After every flight into Egypt, we leave Bethlehem, and go and dwell in Nazareth. We cease shutting up religion to moments of meditation ; we stop looking upon it as a merely personal matter for ourselves. Doctrines that we have always heard, have new meanings, and Christ grows in nearness to us. We must apply every thing, we must carry the work of religion far and wide ; it must be a weapon wherewith to do service for our God. Happy are we as we have such experiences : we are following in the steps of our Master. It is thus that we grow ; it is under those very experiences of trial and temptation, which the parent so much dreads for his child, that that child's religion becomes more earnest and practical. God will care for it. If it has the spirit of Christ in it, it comes out better for all its trials. The world may not talk so much about it, and call it pure and innocent ; they may see only a sinning man that is striving to be better : but God knows how deep and earnest all that religion is now, and will bless it by teaching it even more constantly. We cannot afford to stop for comparisons or lamentations in our life. It will not do to be wishing ourselves in Bethlehem.

Nazareth is a better place for us, though it may not be quite so easy or fascinating. We want an applied religion, and not a theoretical one ; we want a useful religion, and not a merely beautiful one.

The beauty is all in the religion ; that will all come out in due time. Christ's living in Nazareth did not do away with the fact that He was born in Bethlehem. He did His work in Nazareth, and by that work all the glories of Bethlehem had their true meaning given to them. Hundreds of people come back from travelling in Palestine every year, knowing not one true fact more of Christ. They have read their Bibles there, they have been enthusiastic over memories and feelings ; but those make not Christianity. This Nazareth of plain home-life is the place to learn and show Christ ; the inward experience of God's protection in our Egypt is the only thing that can give our religious fervor a true and substantial foundation. Here is our Holy Land, made sacred by the moments that Christ has walked with us in life. One Christian home is better than the cave of the nativity at Bethlehem, and it is only because of such homes that that cave is of interest to any one. And all the treasures we bring from that land of rich memories, in our Bibles or our travels, are made valuable by our use of them in our lives here.

Christ went into Egypt on account of other men's sins ; Herod's angry jealousy drove him thither. Our Egypts are prepared for us by our own sins. That is a difference of which we can never lose sight. But His experience under the sin of the world can teach us what shall be our experience under our sin if we take it with His guidance. It can be conquered. Can we not all recall sad flights and reverses in life? They are inevitable to us. The world has them ready for us. Thank God that the power of Him who met them and conquered is now with us ! Through Him we can go as sons of God, not as mere weak men. He will lead us through them all, and bring us out safely. His life and His power meet us at the darkest moments. He is to be our guide and Saviour, our Lord, through every dark valley, even to death. And we bless God for this Saviour, who not only was born in Bethlehem, but fled into Egypt, and lived in Nazareth, that He might reign in heaven forever.

XXI.

THE WORK OF LENT.

"Therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee." — EXODUS xxxiii. 5.

IN the observance of Lent we are not doing a new thing. The very name of its opening day, Ash Wednesday, carries us back to the times of the Old Testament, when, stripping themselves of what was beautiful and attractive in life, the children of Israel expressed their sense of sorrow for sin, or their appreciation of the calamities which it had brought, by sitting in sackcloth and ashes. The same process of humiliation is necessary to-day ; and we change our usual customs, put away methods of life and modes of action, strip ourselves of ornaments of ordinary times, that we may express, like our brethren of old, before God, our sense of sorrow for sin, which is as universal and destructive with us as it was with them.

In these times of brighter and wider revelation, we ought to understand the meaning of such action better than they did. It ought to be

free from formalism; for time and time again, since those habits of mourning came into existence, God has told His people that it is substance and not form which He desires. All superstitious ideas ought to be banished, for we have learned, through Christ, of the nearness of God to man without the intervention of rites and ceremonies. It is a season with a likeness to Jewish ordinances, because man, in his nature and his wants before the presence of God, is ever the same; it is a Christian season, because its one object is to make us know more of that nearness of God to man, which is the great fact of Christianity. In these words from the Old Testament we have one of God's most explicit statements of the need of such observance; and we ask the meaning of that reason, which He assigns for a season of special penitence and humiliation, that all such services may be more reasonable and more real to our hearts and minds.

God wishes to know what to do with us. If the putting aside of ornaments, no matter how valuable or brilliant they may be, is the condition of that process, it ought to be done: for God's action must be full of power and of love; and to be told that His hand is to be felt in our life, must imply that a blessing is to be bestowed upon us far beyond any thing that can come from any

other addition. It is better to have God with us than any thing else. He is the source of good ; and any portion of the good of life, which may be our ornament, must be but a small blessing in comparison with His thought and effort for us. Sometimes what God would do for us seems to be harsh or even cruel ; we cry out against the dispensation that comes from His hand : and there is nothing to do but to go back to our fundamental belief and conception of God, as one in whom power and love meet, and to declare, "It is the Lord : let Him do what seemeth Him good." We would not interfere with any of His action upon us : we would not remove what serves to further such action ; we would not retain what tends to retard it. And that spirit, which is the only one that ever gives the key to involuntary deprivation of those ornaments upon which human hearts are set, equally inspires the action of voluntary relinquishment, whether it be permanent or temporary. It is the Lord's command ; He has made it the condition of His work for us ; and that work is so valuable, so indispensable, that we gladly receive the condition.

Never at any stage of His revelation has God ceased, in one form or another, to prescribe temporary and voluntary relinquishments, in order that He may enter. We pass from the prescribed fasts

of the old covenant to the words of Jesus, who, without reiterating such prescriptions, only said, that, when the bridegroom was taken away from them, the children of the bride-chamber would necessarily and naturally fast; and we hear such words as "Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door," thereby leaving the world behind thee; "Leave all that thou hast, and follow me;" "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee;" and they are only types of the announcement of an alternative between the world and God which runs through His whole life, and inspires His whole service. The ornaments, or God's voice, — that is the simple form of choice which is thrust upon us over and over again in life, in alternatives of action, in circumstances of bereavement and loss, in our desires and our possessions. Lent would make the issue a very clear one as it asks us in accordance with God's word and the command of His Church, to strip ourselves of many things which ornament our lives. It does it, not as a temporary thing only, although some of its features may be temporary, but that it may impress upon us that which is being demanded of men every day and everywhere, and that it may prepare us for every occasion in which the word of God and the action of God can be obtained only at the sacrifice of our own comfort and desire.

Although we can never enter into the full understanding of God's commands, because they cover so large a range of experience and life, that there is always more to learn of them, yet we are allowed to get glimpses of reasons for them, which show us how true they are, while they also suggest how much there is behind which we have yet to learn. The object of God's dealings with men is, that He may destroy their sin. And there is no more fruitful source of sin than those ornaments which He tells us to put away. The things which gather about our lives are causes of separation from our brother. Human souls are the same. When, in some moment of common experience, we get near to our brethren, we find that joy and suffering are very much alike in all the human family, and that much the same desires move us all; and at all times we know that the beginnings and the endings of life are the same. There ought to be no sin between man and man, belonging as they do to the same family. But the very likeness underneath intensifies the sense of difference in all the surroundings and circumstances of life. The struggle to improve those, brings us into rivalry and competition with our fellow-men. Envy and jealousy arise as the different degrees of success become evident; misunderstandings result from

the different points of view from which we see the things of life; separation impresses itself upon all the life, alike of classes and of individuals, and the sense of brotherhood is gone. These are the results of our ornaments. We hang them out, and they become war-standards and battle-flags. We gaze upon them in the secrecy of our own hearts, and their numbers fill us with pride, or their fewness wears us out with repinings. We congratulate ourselves upon them, and straightway there is a desire for more, to be obtained at any expense of inconvenience or suffering to our brother. The innocence or the desirability of the ornament may make no difference in the result. Learning, applause, and culture may make us just as forgetful, or unsympathetic, or even cruel, towards others, as the more material possessions of life.

We can see, therefore, that the command, "Put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee," is like the call of a John the Baptist: Make the way plain, the path straight and level, for the coming of the Lord; remove the stumbling-block which has been in thy own or thy brother's path. Men must learn to see their oneness as brothers, before sin can be done away; lives very different from each other must be placed side by side, and then new modes of

thought and of comparison will at once enter. Possibly those against whom our thoughts have been bitterest, may have been carrying on a deeper and more intense battle with sin than we have; but their shining ornaments have concealed the struggle from us, or our better-equipped life has not allowed us to see the greater nobility of their characters. If we could once step out of the world, and let the noise of its rivalries die down, how much we should discover of what is going on about us and within us! We can do so partially; and the more complete we can make the elimination of worldly relations and cares, and the more thoroughly we can come to understand just what we are in the sight of God, the more perfectly will the season prepare us for assuming again, and with new hope, all the relations of life. How petty most of our sins are! How often one word, which gives us a glimpse into the real condition of another's heart, makes us ashamed of some feeling which we have been cherishing toward him! And the one cry of penitence, and the prayer for forgiveness and help, which we all together, through the season of Lent, without distinction of class or position, utter to God, will be truly effectual for the blessing of life, as that in which we pride ourselves is forgotten, that for which we despise others is put aside, and we strive to be God's chil-

dren, and nothing else, in the sight of Him and of our brethren.

But the sins against our brethren are not the only evil that our ornaments work, and do not constitute the only reason why they must be abandoned before God can do His work for us. Those very sins spring from a deeper injury which has been done to our souls. These things that have attached themselves to life come to be regarded as its substance, and to regulate its whole movement. Gradually, by a process which is almost imperceptible, they present themselves as our reliance; and moral retrogression sets in, so that we have no other standards but those of the world by which to live. Our thoughts of right and wrong become regulated by conventionalities; what is generally called wrong, we grant to be so, and know nothing of any deeper rule. Our motives for action become things of expediency, and are changed by every new tide in affairs. Our views are limited by the things of this life, and take into account no greater possibilities. We do not notice this; but in all our communities there are men who have dropped out of the circle of religious life, because these very blessings in life have become their dependencies. And in all our lives there are modes of action, and deeds of omission and commission, which

we excuse, because we have come to feel them to be necessary to us.

Now, to such a state of a man's life, the words "Put away thy ornaments" mean, Cease to depend upon the present condition and surroundings of life. Think of yourself as an immortal soul. Try to imagine yourself as cut off from all these pursuits and surroundings, for so, in fact, you must be at some time; and then, when these ornaments are put aside, count over the treasures of your life, and see whether there is enough left to support an immortal soul. That is the nature of the cry of religion against the things of this life, whether it be heard in the voice of the approaching Lenten season or from the mouth of some earnest reformer. It is often misunderstood. But it is not a wild, an unreasoning, a fanatical cry: it has the deepest meaning behind it. Savonarola, thundering against the follies of Florence, was carrying on the same battle for earnest living which we take up each Lent. There may be many dull ears into which the sound never comes, just as there were plenty of men in that mediæval city to spurn or to persecute the prophet who told of coming destruction. There are those to whom all thoughts of any life but that which they are living seems an empty dream; and they settle down to their contented life, immersed in earthly interests and occu-

pations. But to those of us who, in greater or less degree, have a desire to know the things of eternal life, let the nature of the call of such a season as this be plain, that we may the more truly understand it ourselves, and also carry it to others who do not hear it directly.

It is a call to greater moderation and carefulness in the use of the things of this life, so that they shall not become our masters; it is a call to exalt the true Master of our life, so that every ornament of our being shall be discarded forever, which is not worthy to minister to His glory, or which attempts to fight against His supremacy, so that all which remains shall be used in obedience to His commands, and in subservience to His purposes. It is by this test that innocent and sinful indulgence in the things of this life is to be discriminated, that the line of the too much and the too little is to be drawn, and that we are to be made men and women worthy and fit to use the world rightly. Such a putting aside of our ornaments as that, at this time, would prevent our eager rush to get them back again, and to use them as if our life depended upon them. It would stop the sacrificing of the best and brightest of our land to the customs of fashion or the demands of the world; it would mark the Christian profession as the most reasonable and

far-seeing mode of life, and so draw to it those who, of themselves, would know nothing of its true blessing; it would open such a door of refreshment to the world, that men would be glad to stream into it, and to secure more of the happiness to which it gave an entrance. Such is our work for others during this season, as well as for ourselves; and the two works are one, so that they can never be separated.

But why does God need that the ornaments of men's lives should be put off before He shall know what to do unto them? Is it not limiting His power, to say that He cannot deal with us as we are, with all our ornaments upon us? The work which God is to do for us has, for its greatest mark, that it is dependent upon what we are. It is the work of overcoming sin. If it were not for that, there would be no Lent, no work of redemption, no story of the death of an incarnate Saviour. God, when He made man, gave him all that he needed for full development and growth in every way. Creation on God's part was a full gift, so full that it even involved the possibility of sin. He bestowed upon man freedom of will, that he might use all these things rightly; by that He made him His child, and granted him dignity and position above all other created things. Man's course was forward and

upward, ever increasing in power and glory, while obedience and dependence upon God ruled his action. No redemption would be necessary for such a being. Man's sin, his desire after the things of this world, his willingness to build up his life with those, created the great necessity. The self-will of man called upon God for new action,—action which His Divine wisdom could alone create, and which His Divine power could alone execute. That He may know what it shall be, He asks some indication of man's desire. It is not great, it is not that which any soul cannot render. His arm must alone bring the relief; but, while every ornament of a false and worldly life is held devotedly and proudly, how can the relief ever find access to that life wrapped around with other things? The man's willingness to put those aside will determine what God shall do. There is nothing to do but to punish, to let the life which so persistently holds to what has been its destruction go its own sad way of separation from God, if there is no relaxing of the nervous grasp on earthly good and ornament. But at the very first sign of a willingness to put such things away, to bridle life's passion, and to restrain life's desire, the way of redeeming love is open. Man is ready; and God knows what to do, and He is able to make him His child once more.

That is to be the spirit of which Lent's renunciations are to speak. They are to tell, not of our conforming to an ecclesiastical or social custom, but of our willingness and eagerness to have God take us, and form us in Christ Jesus to what we were made to be. The way is open. God has gone before us: He has shown us what He wants to do for us in the story of the love and redemption of Jesus Christ, which has been told to us over and over again, but which has never done its full work, because our hearts were elsewhere; our desires were not toward God and His glory, but were fixed upon our present life and its ornaments. There are indications enough of that fact in the selfish absorption of the life which surrounds us; in the small proportion of our charities to our luxuries; in the money squandered on amusement, while souls are everywhere living without the knowledge of God the Saviour; in the fortunes which are given to those who for an hour or two minister to our pleasure, while earnest ministers of the Gospel of Christ are allowed to starve through years of faithful labor. But already the first hours of a season of self-examination have made us, I hope, look within, and deeply, for more personal signs of the hindrances which oppose the Gospel of Christ,—in stunted devotion; in heartless prayers, contrasted

with eager business action or pleasure-seeking; in unwillingness to give to God the hours of His own day in His own house; in the small attention given to things of the soul and of eternity; in disregard of our Saviour and of His will; in small growths of religious knowledge, while everywhere else cultivation of ourselves is the rule; in aversion to conscientious duties, and a desire to avoid them. Surely there is reason why God has not been able to do what He has so long wanted. He has been waiting to be gracious, and we have made His waiting longer and more painful. Now let us rejoice at this season for putting away the mere ornaments of life, and in it open our ear anxiously, constantly, eagerly, to hear the word of His gracious intention. God's treasury is full of the true ornaments of life. He readily offers them to us. Receive them as readily, and the world's ornaments will lose their false glitter; our hearts will cease to desire them with that eager covetousness, which conceals all the better impulses of the soul, and God will be able to do for us all the deep purposes of His wisdom and His love.

XXII.

THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."—1 PETER iii. 18.

THE great figure put before our minds by these words is that of a suffering Saviour. And by that word "also" the apostle Peter, who had been a witness of Christ's sufferings, places them in connection with all the experiences of ordinary life. We sometimes fear to do so. It seems as if they were too great a fact to be placed side by side with the sufferings of ordinary men. They have been justly exalted for so long a time as the very power of salvation for the world of men, that it often seems as if they could have no relation or similarity to the ordinary experiences of that world. And so we are glad of the authority of an apostle for the fact, that whatever gave those sufferings power, can be found as an element of power in all suffering, and that he who understands them and uses them will find that all the suffering of the world has a new aspect and power in his sight.

Suffering is universal in the world. It comes

from the first wailings of the infant to the last enfeebled cry of old age. It is found in the silent endurance of weakness and in the bold struggle of strength. It is moral and physical : it perplexes our minds, troubles our nerves, tasks our bodies, wounds our hearts, injures our spirits. It is in every station and rank of life. It is so various in its manifestations, that it seems as if we took a new lesson in it every day. Sometimes it comes by the forces of nature, and again by the acts of man. Life and death both bring it ; sickness and health only vary its manifestations. So universal a fact must mean a great deal ; and, if we could only seize its meaning rightly, we should know of God's wisdom and of His intention for this world of men. To pass it by, to try to deny it, to make the ignoring of it a victory over it, is very short-sighted policy ; it is what we would do with no other fact of like universal significance and power. And therefore, when Christ begins His Gospel with the fact of suffering, when He lays His hand on that which all the world recognizes, but tries to ignore, we are at a loss whether to admire most the wisdom or the love of the method ; together the boldness and the reasonableness of what He does startle us into asking the secret of one who could thus utilize the world's greatest enemy, and turn in defence of mankind

the very weapons which have so long wrought their destruction.

A Gospel which saves men by joy, by victory, by glory, is closed to half the world : one that saves them by suffering is open to all ; it appeals to all mankind. He who, out of what the world despised or dreaded, has been able to bring a blessing to mankind, is crowned with special honor, as one who just so far has moved above the ordinary laws of life, and has possessed an insight beyond his fellow-men. The man who taught to his fellow-men the uses of destructive fire was the hero of ancient mythology ; the men who have bridled the lightnings, and chained the forces of air and water, are the great names of modern civilization. But what shall we say of Him, who stopped not with the powers and material of the earth, but, going into the heart and life of man, found there the fact of suffering, and out of that formed the corner-stone of His kingdom ? who, out of the cries and groans to which we close our ears, made the praises of God resound through the world ? The secret of such a transformation as that must become known to us before we understand Christ and His work. Now and then we see it in some lesson of patient suffering, of purified character, of consecrated energy under trial, to which our experiences give us access ; and we

treat such things as accidental and personal. No: they are the very best illustrations of Christ's working; they have the characteristic of all His life; they show that there is something in the world greater than the power of earth—and to learn that, is the object of our special knowledge and study of a suffering Saviour.

In this bold action the first element of strength is, that all suffering is traced to one source. Suffering is made to flow from sin. Christ suffered for sin, suffered as a criminal, suffered because of sin, under the weight of sin. In this light we see that the mode and occasion of Christ's death had great significance. They were meant to express the fact, that whatever He bore through all His life,—the poverty, the opposition, the misunderstanding, the faithlessness,—all were connected with sin. He who endured them, took them as part of the experience of a world, in which sin was an all-pervasive fact. As He identified Himself with that world which even condemned Him, the perfectly pure one, to die as a criminal, He expressed forever the fact that suffering flows from sin. He told it by experience, not by any doctrinal statement, or by any inferences from the first entrance of sin into the world. He with His Divine wisdom and life, stated decidedly that of which we with our smaller sight get little glimpses.

For as we see how many forms sin takes, and that from each one of those forms there flows a special stream of evil results, we must be prepared for this statement of Christ's life and experience. Crime, selfishness, carelessness, weakness, — those are all forms of sin ; misuse or neglect of human power given by God, — that is the very essence of sin, whether it shows itself in the outbreaks of depraved life, or in the insinuating and pervasive faults of sheltered and protected existence. And it is from those things, mingling in every form and degree, that our sufferings come. It is those things poured into the world from the very beginning, and through all the course of human experience, which have made this world a suffering world. For this earth which we inhabit is a splendid heritage ; it moves by laws which, the more we know them, occasion so much the more wonder and admiration. It yields itself to man's needs with a richness which each generation has cause to admire anew. Suppose that from the beginning every man had used it rightly, always with a sense of responsibility to God, always with a feeling of love to his neighbor, always with a mind eager to learn the laws of that which his Father had given him : how, under such treatment, the load of the world's miseries would have been avoided ! One hand inspired by such feelings to-day lifts an enor-

mous weight from human shoulders. We trace back the events of our own life one single year, and see how, if we had been better, we should have been happier ; and we picture all the race of men retracing their steps over the track of the ages, and the goal they reach must be happiness. The wisdom of Christ, the singleness of His purpose, the central power of His action, start out before us then ; and we feel that He was indeed one who was fitted to deal with the great fact of human suffering, as He could thus put His finger on the very place whence it all flowed.

We men are not ready to acknowledge this fact of sin's power ; it seems as if it made our case only darker and more desperate. Suffering is on the surface ; but shall we deliberately say that in the very depths of our being we are diseased ? Shall we do that which would seem to turn struggle into despair ? Is it not better to do all that we can to put away the causes of suffering which lie on the surface, and which we can easily alleviate, and so get down to the deeper troubles ? We ought to have learned that it is only by getting at the true nature of a difficulty that we are able to conquer it ; the new and deeper knowledge opens ways of approach unthought of before. There stood in proud seclusion the steepest peak in the Alps. Men looked at it, and said that human foot could

never scale its heights. Bolder spirits tried every way which they could devise, approached it from all sides but one; and they succeeded in reaching certain points, but still there towered above them that inaccessible point. At length a wiser, more experienced eye was turned to that very side which had been pronounced evidently impossible; and, as he thus faced what had seemed the most despairing side of the problem, he saw that the strata of the earth below, broken sharp off in the upheaval of that majestic peak, furnished a series of steps which made the passage possible directly to the summit; and now every year even unexperienced feet make their way over the path thus opened. If any of us stand wondering how the mountain of our own or the world's suffering shall be conquered, and have never seen the path opened on the side of man's sin, have tried every way but the fight against sin, have shed tears over every calamity but the depravity of our nature, have done every thing but confess our sins in the sight of God, nay, have dismissed that as too dark and hard a side of the problem for us to face, now let the way opened by One who knew the secrets of our nature and of the generation of that mountain of suffering, — let that way be the one for our feet to follow. Thousands have been over it with Him, and conquered their suffering through the knowl-

edge and power which He gave. And to-day His Cross says to us all, "Suffer for sin; and in doing that, through Him conquer all suffering."

One of our greatest troubles, under the suffering which we feel ourselves or see in the world, is, that it does not seem to come upon the right people. We could bear with a great deal of suffering, if this sense of injustice was not often mingled with it; we could more readily admit the connection between sin and suffering if we always saw suffering follow sin, and happiness as the return for goodness. But too often we hear it cynically said, that the good son has to suffer for the reckless and selfish enjoyment of the bad one; and from our lips the complaining word often comes, "I do not see what I have done to merit this affliction." We have already seen that the problem of human suffering is one which men have given up in despair, and therefore we have no reason to be surprised at any difficult features of it which appear in our daily experience. But when this great Master approaches this very fact of suffering, as the one which He will use in His work, we have reason to expect a word of authority from Him on this most distressing feature of it. And it is here; "the just for the unjust," Christ suffered. That runs through all His life,—the thought that it was the very sinlessness of His

life that made Him able to do the work for sinful men, that made Him able to take up the load of sin. The fact that He came from the Father, and was ever bound to the Father, was the very thing that made Him able to call men back to the Father.

It is the privilege of strength to suffer for weakness. As it does so, strength is glorified; it conquers weakness, it spreads the power of its own life, it becomes strength in its right place. The foolishness of evil men and of bad policy involves a nation in war; and then the best part of that nation has to come to the front,—the wisest statesmen, the greatest generals, the bravest soldiers. And they have to suffer, and perhaps die, for the nation, which foolishness and wickedness, that cannot save, have injured. What shall we say as they thus make their names glorious, and their strength counteracts the weakness of the land? Surely we would not pity them; we would feel that they were doing the very thing for which they had their strength. Such things are written out in the field of our larger and better experience, that we may be saved from small fault-finding in our ordinary life, where merit does not seem to regulate happiness. Those are the examples from human experience which can solve for us the distressing problems of the good suffering for the bad. But in the imperfection of human

life, in the share which we all have in the sin of the world, they do not have their true force until we see them carried out in their perfection in the death of Christ. We know not the work which that death performed: our sight is too short for us to perceive all the evil effects of sin which it counteracted, all the deep connections of a disordered universe which it set right. But we know that it was because He had the might of the Son of God that He could do the work, we know that it was because He was above the world of sinning men that He could suffer for their sins, and so we are forever bound to Him as our Saviour. We follow Him who suffered for us. These words of the Old Testament describing the position of David have their fulfilment: "I have laid help upon one that is mighty." Only the mighty can help; and, as He thus helps, we look to His might as the reason for it, and through the work for us we find our Saviour. It is not gratitude alone,—that, indeed, moves us as we think of what He did for us,—but it is the opening of the source of strength by which He was able to do it. We come to Him through gratitude; and, as we reach Him, we find Him one who is mighty to save, because He could bring us near to God.

This shows us the meaning and power of the

last clause of our text. The apostle seems to be unable to keep the form of illustration perfect as he approaches that great fact. He has been saying that Christ's sufferings were so like the sufferings of the disciples, that they could feel the sustaining power of them. But here it is not likeness, it is dependence, that is brought out. These sufferings were to bring to God the very men who were now exhorted to imitate them. Exhortation and illustration mingle together, and so it must ever be. It is utterly useless to hold up a great example unless you can get at the secret of his power. Never were they to forget that they had been brought to God by those sufferings. They had opened His love. They had drawn to Him who was able to reveal God to them. They had made the world a different place, one that had the power and presence of God as well as of man in it; never were they to forget that. But, as they remembered it, it would affect their lives, and change the whole character of them. The mystery of life's power would be made theirs. They, too, would have but one object, —to bring men to God. For what good is it to lift the burden off men's shoulders for a moment, if it falls back again in the same place? Is not that like the mere aid to a poor man by the temporary relief of alms, of which we hear so

much condemnation to-day? Why lift the weight, if there is no assurance against the future? But to bring a man to God, to speak every word and to do every action so that men shall feel the fact that the strength which inspired us came not from ourselves, but from Him who revealed God, — that is to perform a Christian's duty for the world.

Until one could come who could bring men to God, the load of suffering in the world rested unlightened and unsupported. He who could slip out from under it for a moment was happy; he who found a breathing-place under it, where it pressed not too heavily, could philosophize about life and its meaning. But when He came who knew the Father, He must take His place under the heaviest part of that load, and feel its pressure on every side. How much meaning there was to those words of Christ to His disciples, "Ought not Christ to have suffered?" He showed them that it was contained in the prophecies of the older saints; we to-day, farther on in God's development of His world, find the same great fact in all the experiences of Christian life since. Suffering had to be conquered by suffering. The Captain of our salvation had to be made perfect by suffering: He was not the perfect Captain without that. The most powerful, the one to whom all the power of God belonged, must bring it to help the world

of suffering and of sinful men ; He must stand with the world to which He came, suffer for it that He might make it His forever.

Never was there a time when the suffering of the world was so keenly felt as it is to-day. There is probably no more suffering in the world than there has been in any past age ; but men feel it more keenly, and know that something must be done about it. They rebel against it for themselves and for others. So far, at least, the Master's wisdom and method have prevailed ; but their real power is bound up with deeper truths of the source and of the cure of sin, as we have seen to-day. We want the whole of His work ; and therefore a philanthropic age needs the Cross, men anxious to alleviate the sufferings of the world need to have their own hearts broken for their sins, and all of us need to cling to these events of the suffering and death of Christ, and to feel that they contain the very power of our lives within them, — the power of forgiveness and redemption, the power of happiness, the power of true labor, the power of the life eternal for this world and for the world that is to come. So, rejoicing in the Cross of the Master, we shall rejoice in our own crosses, and bearing them, by the power of Him who died for us, enter into the kingdom where there shall be no more suffering or sin.

XXIII.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

"Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit." —

I PETER iii. 18, last clause (Revised Version).

NO man ever yet came out of a great work the same as he went into it; he has always lost something, and gained something. A great effort for a noble purpose taxes a man's strength, it exhausts some of that physical power on which he has to draw; but it builds up character, confidence, and reputation. A great effort for a selfish purpose drains a man's moral resources, he has to surrender nobler considerations and higher purposes; but it leaves him better off in the things of this world, with a larger fortune, and a greater command of earth's luxuries. It is this process of gain and loss to which our attention is called in the review of Christ's death and resurrection. It was a great transaction, nothing less than the attempt to overthrow the reign of sin and suffering in the world. The character and success of the great work would be largely indicated by the

effect on Him who undertook it; the question which all must ask is, What part of Him gained, and what part of Him lost? As that is known, it ought to determine whether it is a work in which we wish to join.

Flesh and spirit were both strong in Christ through all His life. We hear nothing of a frame enfeebled by indulgence, or exhibiting signs of weakness, throughout His career. His spirit was always calm and strong under all circumstances. Then came the contest with sin and suffering, and the body succumbed. It suffered, and went down into the grave. We are not surprised at it; we rejoice that it was able to endure so much, for we feel sure that it contended strongly to the last. When its work was through, the spirit, which had never been daunted, which had relied upon the Father in its darkest moments, had an opportunity to show its strength. It was the spirit of the Son of God. It belonged to Him who was the incarnate Son of God; and it must take that same body, and show its own power, and do what the flesh had been unable to do. Jesus was as vulnerable in the flesh as all other men were. When He said to the disciples, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," He was stating a fact, not only of their experience, but of His own. He was speaking of flesh in its own nature, and not as

enfeebled by sin. He was uttering no reproach to them for their weakness: He was only drawing forth, from His own deep knowledge, a fact which they were too likely to overlook. In the great transaction He must give up the victory of the flesh; its weakness must be proved, however great the humiliation which that might involve. But what was lost there, must be gained elsewhere. The spirit must assert itself: it must be seen to be the life-guard of the body; it must be evident as the great protecting, rescuing power. And when that was once done, there was no defeat. What had been lost by the flesh had been more than made up by spirit, and the great transaction was a victory.

Can we wonder, then, at the Christian's joy at Easter? It is not as a single event by itself, that the resurrection stirs our hearts: it is because it is connected with the whole nature of our being, with the whole work of Christ's life, and with the mysteries of our existence, and of the world forever. It throws a flood of light upon them all; it takes a hundred analogies that are scattered through life, and gives them meaning; it groups together many facts in one consistent whole. The relation between flesh and spirit is so constant a thing, that any thing which sheds light upon it must raise a shout of joy through all the brother-

hood of man. It is not alone a band of true disciples receiving back a Master which keeps the feast : it is the whole race of men, helped in their daily struggles, which rejoices at this overwhelming announcement of their truest position and greatest power.

In this light we feel that we have no right to be surprised or confounded at the fact of the resurrection. We see spirit triumphing over flesh everywhere ; not always, but on every side and in all departments, giving us the hope and key to this great fact. A poor weakened body labors under pain and disease for years ; but the mind grows brighter day by day, and the spirit becomes more refined. Perhaps by influence, perhaps by words, it shows mysteries of thought and feeling which healthier men would never have found. Men deprived of some faculty, which we think indispensable to our success in the world, have, by courage and patience, seemed to prove to us that our bodily endowments are more than true spirits ought to need, as they with less powers of the flesh distance those that have more. Two young men start in life, one with the healthy, sound body, the other with the cultivated mind and disciplined spirit ; and, in ways that are utterly unperceived at first, the latter finds his short path to success, while the other is still plodding on. The little

child, by its gentle, loving spirit, breaks into the hard life that no material motives could move, and where rough, fleshly hands have utterly failed. A nation is strong under a tyrannical hand which seems to repress all nobleness of feeling and purity of life; and one brave man raises his voice, and stirs the sleeping spirit of the nation, and a reformation or a revolution follows. An institution has outlived its day, its mode of action has its reasons among the things of the past; but its spirit passes into the era of a new day, and it lives again in many forms through succeeding generations. I need not multiply examples. It sometimes seems as if spirit could do any thing; and it can, if it is the right spirit. It is its duty to animate the flesh, and it shows itself able to do it; and time after time it manifests its ability far above and beyond all the powers of flesh, making that flesh do things for which it has seemed to have no capability.

Now let it be the perfect spirit, the spirit of the Son of God, and directly in a line with all our experiences is that resurrection from the dead. The very weakness of flesh which makes the resurrection so wonderful, makes it the more natural. If flesh is a dead, sluggish thing, never accomplishing any thing until spirit moves it, so much the greater is the expectation of our minds as we hear

of the power of the Divine spirit approaching it with its marvellous forces. Just because dead bodies do not rise, we believe that Christ must rise. We find no hope of the resurrection but in the greatness of Christ, in His intimate and personal connection with the Father. It was the Father's witness to His being the Son of God; in that He has raised Him from the dead. We exclaim with St. Paul, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" You men who, by the power of souls given you by God, are forever brushing obstacles from your path, are forever raising dead material to positions of importance and influence, which it could not have occupied without you, who are forever infusing into this world and its substance a portion of your power, are you the limits of that strange and effective work? Can it go no farther than you carry it? Cannot He who gave you all your power, as He bound your soul to your body, by that same spirit, of which you are a part, do things which you have never seen done? Can He not accomplish, by His great revelation of Himself, that toward which your eyes have always been set? It is good to know that Easter paths are no strange ones to our human feet; that the flowers which adorn them are brighter and richer forms of those

which our hands are plucking every day, in our use of human energy and spirit given us by our God ; that the songs we raise are purer and better strains of those notes of real victory and power, that constantly make the world cheerful ; that the raising of the great, the only-begotten Son of God was a greater manifestation of that power of the Father of our spirits, by whose strength alone we live and accomplish any thing in this material world.

Spirit is nobler than flesh. Place two men side by side, one of whom has always lived for the flesh, the other of whom has always tried to find the spiritual side of every thing, and of every event with which he has come in contact. The former weighs you down with his grossness. His talk of the pleasures of the table, his gossipy narration of things that have taken place, his dull, unimaginative dealing with all that happens, his narrow interests and selfish aims, they are dreadfully unsatisfying and wearisome. The other always seems to be buoyant with joy and hope of something better. He hates all grossness enough to drop it out of his life ; and yet, with a sympathy with all souls, he finds gleams of hope in those of whom the world can say nothing but evil. You know the two types of men, and of the approaches to them in every degree and form, from your daily

experience with those about you ; you know it still more from the experiences within you.

Every transaction upon which you enter has its two sides : it can exalt the flesh, and kill the spirit ; or it can kill the flesh, and exalt the spirit. Whether we speak of trials or of temptations, it is all the same. Under the first, men may lose their courage ; under the latter, they may lose their purity and nobleness : and both of those are possessions of the spirit. When either of those is gone, the triumph is on the wrong side of man's nature. You deal with the men and women, or with the world of material, and you find that it takes a definite struggle to keep the spirit alive. Every thing says, "Strive for earthly advancement, for worldly gain, for bodily pleasure." As life opens before us, we find that there is more than one question to answer in life, What shall we do ? there is also that other question, How shall we do it ? You may come out of a successful business or social career with all that the flesh can possibly give you, and find that the virtues of the spirit — the unselfishness, the purity, the honor, the thought of better things — have been put out of existence ; you are quickened in the flesh, you are put to death in the spirit.

Here, again, we see that the resurrection of Christ was not an isolated fact, and did not stand

alone. It gathers to itself all the words of the Sermon on the Mount, all the exhortations of nobleness of life, and living above this world, which had been dropping from Jesus' lips ever since He began His ministry. They cannot stand alone; they ask a great completion, a victory on their side, that they may have power, and not meet with discouragement. It seems as if Christ would say, "I appreciate how great a weight of conduct I have put upon you; I would help you bear it. I know how the forces of the flesh press on every side; a greater force of the spirit shall be with you through me. See what the spirit can do to the flesh, and be encouraged in every battle." The power of a risen Saviour is to show itself in spiritual lives. Do not be dismayed by that word "spiritual," as if it meant some kind of invisible pietistic existence, which had no beauty in it; for remember that the power of the risen Saviour did not leave the body in the grave, and walk unclothed among men: it brought that body forth to new life, and placed it on its feet among men. And so the power of the resurrection will go into our business, and make it more than money-getting, by bringing to light the true spirit of serving God, and developing His world; it will enter our amusements, and save us from debasing them to bodily relaxations, and from turning Divine music to low and

sensual uses ; it will enter our houses, and sweep from our tables the literature that dares to be any thing but pure and ennobling ; it will be in our families, training our children to know and desire something more than earthly advancement and position ; it will help us in the performance of every bodily action, and in the use of all this earth, to be noble and pure in motive and deed. It speaks of delicacy of feeling, grace of bearing, and refinement of intercourse, not by rules for the surface of life, but by the presence of that power which finds out our spirits, as surely as the spring sun finds out the seeds and buds. There is not a department of life wherein the presence of a risen Saviour will not be an encouragement to spirit to rise and assert itself as really existent, and rightly dominant in every action that is worth doing. Do you say that this may demand the giving-up of certain things ? Then let them go ; be "put to death in the flesh," if you can but "live in the spirit." That was Paul's desire : "If by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead." It was a matter of present attainment in the triumph of the spirit day by day ; and for that we, too, are to labor, if our Easter joy and songs do indeed mean all that they say.

We saw that this greatest feature of Christ's resurrection was based on the fact that no man

comes out of a transaction the same as he went into it. The same fact can lead us to the most complete participation in that resurrection, to which our minds are always turned. Are we to rise as He did? Had it hope for victory to any beyond Himself? We never come out of the great transaction of life the same as we went into it. We begin with spirit in the infant body, so unable to provide for itself.

“Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory, do we come
From God, who is our home.”

And then the flesh grows and asserts itself, until at length its hour of weakness comes, and, in the failure of disease or of old age, it loses its power, and sinks once more into the earth. What happens then, we ask? What has been going on during that process of changing life? Is there spirit enough to repair the injury? In that great transaction during the reign of the body, has the spirit lost all knowledge of its Father? Have the affinities with better things, which made it welcome so readily in early days the thoughts of heaven that were given it, been so annihilated that it can no longer recognize their truth and power? or has it been tracing the hand of that Father in all the

arrangements and dispensations of life, learning of Him in all the thoughts of its quieter moments, in all the action of its busier days? Has it lived here as if it belonged to God, or belonged to the earth? Has it asserted and cultivated its superiority to the flesh, or bowed to its supremacy at every step?

We never have any doubt as to that question about Christ. We find a clearer view and statement of His nearness to the Father coming out each day, as His life goes on. It flourishes, not in spite of the world, but because of it. More and more He is bound to Him, until at last, in the great occasion of His death, it is not surprising that the trained and strengthened spirit conquers and raises Him. The power of God is met by the love of the Son, and the two work together for the happy result. God could not leave His soul in Hades, He could not suffer His Holy One to see corruption. We can all tell of lives that have so followed Him, have so learned of God's presence and love in the world through Jesus Christ, that at every step in life their spirits have grown stronger, and without effort, nay, of necessity, our hearts include them in the Easter rejoicing, because we know which side of them the great transaction of life strengthened.

Flesh has its day now: its reign is not yet over.

The Son of God has not yet shown all His power in the Church and in the souls of those who are His. Flesh is showing its weakness day by day; kingdoms rise and fall, earthly movements wax and wane, the generations come and go. And when its weakness is fully shown, then the spirit of the Lord shall triumph; and with the resurrection body, with the new heavens and the new earth, the great transactions of creation and redemption ended, the power of the Lord shall be revealed as it was in the garden of old on the first Easter morning. We live in resurrection times. Do not live as if God were absent from the earth: let the revelation of Christ guide you to the great consummation. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Be the sons of God now; and then, through the grave and gate of death, you shall pass to your joyful resurrection: and that victory shall be but the complete revealing of the power of that God and Saviour, whom you have followed and served all your life.

XXIV.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." —
JOHN iii. 13.

THE ascension of Christ often seems to separate us from Him. Not only the wonder of the act itself, but the fact that it took Him away from earth and the companionship of men, seems to make it like a great door that shuts upon the wondrous life, and excludes us from that fellowship with it for which its other events had led us to hope. And, when the life of Christ seems thus enclosed between the wonder of the incarnation at one end and the wonder of the ascension at the other, it will often lose its naturalness, and become a little episode by itself, which we know not how to use, or when to summon to our help.

Any such restricted idea of the ascension as a convenient and suitable way of closing the earthly life of Christ, disappears as we hear, in this verse, Christ referring to the ascension as a thing which already belonged to Him, and distinguished Him

from other men. For He uttered these words at the very beginning of His ministry, as a part of His conversation with Nicodemus. Whatever power took Him away from the earth, as the disciples stood looking up into heaven, was in Him, therefore, at that early day. The elements of that wonderful departure were present in all the events of His life, which approach so near to our own experience; and the last and the greatest miracle only put those elements into their most striking form, by which men might be led to recognize their greatness and glory. The ascension, thus intimately connected with all the life of Christ, tells us that the power of that life consists not in its separation from men, but in its nearness to them. No miracle hedges it in, but each miracle rather opens the way to its treasures. As the old poet put it, —

“Christ never did so great a work, but there
His humane nature did in part appeare;
Or ne’er so mean a piece, but men might see
Therein some beames of His divinitie.”

To see rightly the conditions and circumstances of the great works, will fill all the meaner pieces with that lustre, to which the divinity which is in them entitles them. He was the ascended Lord in the presence of timid and ignorant Nicodemus,

in the chamber at Jerusalem, in the darkness of night, as much as He was in the open air, with a band of loving and devoted disciples viewing His departure from them. That last action was unique: there was nothing like it. No man hath so ascended but He. But, as the things which made Him thus ascend are in other men, the ascension becomes a permanent fact for redeemed human nature, as it was for Christ while on earth; and heaven is ever open to us, as it was to Him.

Two things, Christ says, distinguish His character as ascended, and therefore we may suppose that they make up the power of the ascension. "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." Take the first of them. It must be one who came down from heaven that ascends to heaven. That is very natural and true to all experience. We can get out of a thing precisely the power and the substance that are in it. The seed returning in the spring the same kind of richness that was packed away in it in the preceding autumn, illustrates the truth. The water rising to the level of its source, the vapor returning to the heaven where once it dwelt as cloud, —all these tell the same story, only more emphatically and beautifully the more we know of them. We believe in the same truth, and rely upon it, in

education and in all our dealings with men. We boast of our lineage of honorable ancestors, as some promise of what we ought to be; we see with apprehension the marks of poor stock showing themselves in those under our charge; and, by our hopes and our fears, our encouragement or condemnation, we tell the principle of the words, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven." Men will go where they belong; and, when we use the principle wrongly and cruelly, it is because we do not believe it and see it in all its force, and not because we believe in it too strongly or carry it too far. We condemn some man or child with the easy remark, "Oh, there is no doing any thing with him: he comes of bad stock." We willingly forget, from sloth or prejudice, that that stock came from the same humanity which produces the highest and noblest types; we overlook that power of the personal soul, which, with all its impression of bad stock, came direct from God, and therefore has a power all its own. Had we carried our principle to its right conclusion, we should have kept all the advantage of recognizing and endeavoring to correct past evil results, and have filled ourselves, and him for whom we labored, with hope of what could be done.

And therefore, when Christ lays this principle

down so generally, He states something which acknowledges and allows for all the differences among men, and at the same time fills all men with hope. By keeping a man's origin before him, He fills him with a constant sense of his destiny. We can understand, therefore, why, through all Christ's words, there runs such a constant reference to the place from which He came. To feel that He was sent by the Father, armed Him for all difficulties ; to preserve clear to His mind the fact that He came from above, filled all His life with the light of the great victory that was to be its close. And that same power which He used so constantly, He would give to men. "You are from above," He says to all whom He meets. Little children received into His arms in all their innocence, sinners stained so that men would not look at them,—they all had one claim upon Him. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." How like a great Master of all humanity Christ goes to the centre of all trouble and difficulty, and touches the one thing that could give strength to all men at all times ! How the Ascension, in this light, embodies the central, practical truth of all His teaching ! You are God's children : that is your only hope of heaven, He says. You have forgotten it ; therefore your prospects of

heaven are clouded by sins, which absence from your God has made you commit ; therefore your hopes of it are dampened by discouragements, which the troubles of life are ever impressing upon you. Come unto me : I forgive the sin, and lighten the troubles, by telling of your relation to God ; and so I open heaven, from which you came. Surely not one loving word of forgiveness and encouragement would have its right meaning, unless He who spake it had opened the heaven to which it leads. Christ in a much higher form gives to a man that same spirit of hope and courage which in all times men have drawn from a noble ancestry ; and He gives to men that same motive for purity which, in the temptations and corruptions of city life, keeps many a young man pure, as he remembers the old home of his childhood, and the mother who sits within, waiting for him to return, as simple and uncorrupted as he was when he went forth to his life's work. "God made me for His." Simple as that fact is, it needed all Christ's work to reveal the Father so that we should feel it. But now it is ours, and we can use it freely and powerfully to keep ourselves pure, to prepare ourselves for that return thither.

Two features of all sin this view of our claim on heaven will especially oppose. One is its temptation to delay, and the other the inclination to

fitfulness in moral character. Heaven, we say, is distant; we will begin to prepare for it when we have sufficiently attended to the pressing demands of earth. But heaven came before earth in Christ's teaching; we were God's before we were the world's. His is the prior claim, and therefore first to be satisfied. Imperiously it pushes all others aside, and says, "You owe allegiance to me before all other lords." Before even the bands of sweetest family ties held you, surely before these earthly circumstances held you, of which you now make every thing, you were God's, and drew the power of your life from heaven. It is the one important fact, towering above all others with a pre-eminence that attracts by its very boldness. Realize it in all its force, and the very motives of human ambition to obtain and to hold the highest, which now so often lead us wrongly toward the very lowest, will be found pointing to the service of God.

And then, how fitful we are in our service of God! We sometimes even find ourselves setting evil against good, excusing to-day's selfishness by yesterday's charity, or covering the corruption of the world with the worship of the Church, and so trusting, that, on the whole, we are making our way to heaven. But what pertains to our origin is ours at all times. A man cannot put

off and assume his origin at pleasure. Whatever he does, of work or play, at home or abroad, that old time-stained genealogical tree, shut up in his drawer at home, still tells the spirit which should possess it all. And so the heavens, rightly opened to us, are absent from no part of our life: like the skies over our head, which have been taken for their symbol, they are visible from all parts of the earth's surface. The march to the heavens is steady, when the trumpet that marshals it is heard ringing through the soul in its earliest days, before any earthly sound has entered. We hear it thus, and it becomes dear to us; we miss it when it is absent; and every moment is filled with the power of God. There is a meaning to that value of being religious in our childhood, far beyond the sentimental one which men often put upon it. It does embody the central fact on which all religion depends: we were God's before we belonged to any other.

But a man's origin is very far from being the whole of his life. If it were, we could write the history and tell the end of men at their very first years. But the first years see a thousand new influences enter; things of different origin meet and clash together. If men of heavenly origin are to come to heaven, there must be some power over circumstances and surroundings. And we find

Christ speaking of that as the second condition of His Ascension: "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." It was because He was in heaven during all His life, that He could speak of His Ascension with such certainty as a permanent fact. Instead of losing the power of His return to the place whence He came, He was gaining it daily. We all of us know well enough what earth is, to be convinced that it is not heaven. Its sin, its suffering, its disappointments, are prominent enough in others' lives, if not in our own, to make us feel that it is far enough from being heaven. Christ appreciated all that far more than we, with our affinity to the dark things of earth, can ever do. He was a man who entered into all that was about Him; He lived in no state of abstraction, as a scholar may walk in the midst of his fellow-men without seeing them, because all the time he is really in his study. In that sense Christ surely did not mean that He was in heaven. He sympathized with men, and helped them, and showed how really He was among them. And yet, in Jerusalem, accepted by no appreciable number of men, without friends, in the darkness of a timid night interview, He could say, "I am in heaven." The side of those words which tell of His Divine power of om-

nipresence, we can never solve, for we cannot understand that with our bodily limitations ; but we do know enough of the power of changing and transforming circumstances, to feel how Jesus was always in heaven.

What are the circumstances that make heaven or hell on earth for men? We look at some man endowed with all that we think makes happiness, — with honor, wealth, position, — and a cry of disappointment from him breaks in on the pictures of his heaven on earth that we have been painting. The surroundings of poverty, sickness, and disappointment seem to make a life as undesirable as possible ; and some expression of contentment or happiness from the very person we are pitying seems like a ray from heaven. It is no defiance of circumstances : it is the use of them in a way different from any which we, standing outside, imagined, that makes the difference. That power was Christ's always. Not only He, but all that He had, came from the Father. Sometimes He could dwell upon the Father's power in the things around Him, and again it was the Father's power in Him who used those things. But it was always the Father's eternal presence which brought into unity toward the one great destiny His origin and His circumstances.

That is the side of omnipresence that we can

appropriate. It belonged to Christ as the great eternal Son, as it never can belong to us. But it was not cold, hard possession of power : it drew light and warmth from that fact that the Father was everywhere. He had omnipresence, because He was one with the Father. We do not hear Him boasting of the power ; we only see Him using it in full sympathy with that Father's will and purpose. On that side, its best and richest one, we who through Christ are made the sons of God, enter into that attribute of His. The Father is ours ; and where we are, there He ever is. It is useless to rely upon our origin alone in order to find our way to heaven. We are like the delicately nurtured child lost in one of our streets. The very warmth and beauty of that lost home make the confusion of the street, the want of sympathy in the passers-by, the hurry and bustle, more bewildering than to one who comes from less attractive surroundings. The one finds his way home much more easily than the other. How easy it is to accomplish earthly purposes, compared to the winning of heaven ! We may tell the remarkable statistics of the few men who succeed in business ; but compare them with the lost characters, the stained souls, about us, and we feel often that the earthly career is, through its certainty, better worth our attention than the heavenly race :

and yet we were made for the latter, and not for the former ; heaven, and not earth, was our origin. We must add to our hopes of heaven the fact of where we are and who is with us ; we must be in heaven now, because God is with us ; and that places our circumstances on the side of our origin in our attainment of a glorious completion to life. Do not say that this is impossible : that word of despair is only a call for the real help of Christ, who brought God near to us all. Only be bold enough to claim His presence in all that fills life to-day, be sure that He is in every event and duty, and that certainty shall turn us away from the sin in which we know that He is not. For he who is with God now, is the one that will be with Him hereafter.

And there is one view of heaven that these words of Christ present, which we must not overlook. Christ's was a struggling, a working, an earnest, life, if ever there was one ; we cannot remove that feature from it. His life was in the very midst of struggle in that interview with Nicodemus, and yet it was a life in heaven. Surely it tells us that heaven has within it struggle and work. That makes it worthy of us ; whereas I think that very often our picture of its ignominious ease makes it fit strangely on some active, earnest soul who has been taken to it or

who longs for it. It gives it new power to make it thus the continuation of life's activity. Before the sound of the words, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel," had ceased to echo, with hands still outstretched in blessing, He was taken from them. Let the ascension, then, be the strength of busy feet, the power of active hands. Take it with you wherever those feet go and wherever those hands work, for it is the consecration with the air of heaven of all this earth for those who know Him, who told us alike how to use life and how to leave it.

XXV.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF A TRIUNE GOD.

"Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." — ISAIAH xlv. 15.

IN this short verse, there is contained the description of God in two characters, — as known and yet unknown, as revealed and yet a mystery, as showing and yet hiding Himself. This comprehensive idea of God had been gained from experience. The names God of Israel and Saviour embody the remembrance of the many occasions when He had shown Himself identified with the nation's life and safety, as He had guided or protected them. And yet, running all through that same history had been the feature of unexpectedness and strangeness in His mode of working ; so that at last the people felt that they knew Him and yet did not know Him. Each new proof of His power and presence only introduced a new point at which the mystery of His being and His ways was felt.

Our experience cannot be said to be greatly

different from the prophet's. We go over the life of Christ, and each point of it is a revelation of our God, telling us that He is a God of His people, and a Saviour; and then we complete our thoughts with an expression of God's being full of hard thoughts and mystery. Christ as the revelation of God, leads to the doctrine of the Trinity. Happy shall we be if we can feel the unity of the two aspects of mystery and revelation as the prophet did, and join them, as he did, without any sense of hostility between them. That is the only hope of our faith in God being a true and steady one, as we acknowledge that He is our God, whom we can and do know, and feel also that He is forever hiding Himself, so that we do not know Him perfectly, as we desire and hope to do.

God hides Himself. Never was there a time when that description of God's action was more common. A century ago, in the attacks on Christianity as a revealed religion, which were made by the deists, and which were thought to be so dangerous, the ground most prominently assumed by the assailants was the needlessness of Christianity. "Christianity as old as creation" was the title of a prominent deistical work: and its one argument was, "The religion of nature is absolutely perfect; revelation can neither add to nor

take from its perfection." But all that is changed now. God is not seen in nature, as nature is looked at to-day ; it is incapable of answering one question about Him ; it neither proves nor disproves His existence ; His hand is outside of its perfect mechanism, as that mechanism is explained to us. It is the same with human thought : it is not capable of knowing God, we are told ; there is no point at which He can enter. That is the last announcement of philosophy, which refuses to be called atheistic, because it devotes itself to the silent worship of an unknown God. It has a God, but He is all-hidden.

This development of an agnostic philosophy, a philosophy of ignorance, is only one indication of the drift of the time. Other and more practical ones are in men's thoughts and in the experiences of life. What has been the story of philosophy, as without a revelation it started to find God, has been the story of many a life. "God is in the world of action," many a conscientious man has said ; "let me seek Him there. There is no need for me to look for Him elsewhere ; let me do my duty as each step in life shall show it, let me follow all guidance of reason and light that comes to me, and I shall find God." Let us leave out all developments of sin which have come from the worldliness and selfishness within us, and ask our-

selves how such a course has ever succeeded with us in the strictest line of duty. Views of God have not become more frequent or more distinct : gradually the thought of Him as a personal and leading Father has receded into the distance. The work became every thing ; the duty we will suppose to have revealed itself in all its intensity and extent, but there was less of God in it.

Do not think, that, as a clergyman, I am speaking of worldly work alone ; I would join the experience of many in that region with that of others in Church-work and ecclesiastical institutions. The experience in those directions of many earnest but disappointed souls is only more striking. You will find men wandering in every field of life who will tell you that the result of their experience is, that God is a God that hideth Himself. They do not deny His existence : they only say that they have not been able to find Him, where they feel sure that they had a right to look for Him. They have found other things, when conscientiously they started with a willingness to find God. They still want to get at Him, but their experience says that almost any thing else is easier to find. They have looked where they thought and still think Him to be, and have not found Him. Is not the carelessness of men about religion often a form of despair ? They rejoice that others can pray, they will help

them do so ; but they cannot, because God seems to hide Himself from them. They can but go on, hoping that the time will come for more knowledge, but hardly seeing how it can be so.

Of course you expect me, as a Christian minister, this morning to say to all this experience, that the remedy is in Jesus Christ, in looking to Him as the personal revelation of God ; and I do say so with all my heart and with all the conviction and authority of Christian revelation. And I want that we should see how the demands of such a state of affairs are answered by special features of the great revealed solution. In the first place, however, let us notice how natural it is that all our difficulties about God should not be cleared away by the great answer. If on every side life defines God as one who hides Himself, if every experience tells us, that, when we have gone forth to search for Him, we have been baffled, is it any wonder, that, as we turn to the new information, points of darkness still remain? Is not our success to be measured, not by the darkness that remains, but by the light that comes? If the Christian revelation still leaves points unexplained, and still makes us live by faith, that characteristic only assimilates it to all our other experiences, and tells us of its naturalness and of the way in which it belongs to us. We should

suspect any theory that did not still tell us of God as a hiding God, when every other side of life so tells us of Him. We feel that there is a certain naturalness to that fact, arising from God's true relation to us; just as a child may play with his father, and be at ease in his presence, and yet trust him completely, only because he feels that there is so much in him that he does not understand, and does not pretend even to touch. This universal experience as to God's hiding of Himself ought to tell us that it is of His very nature. He is ours: that is the reason that failure after failure will not allow the heart of man to give Him up. He is above us, greater than we are: that is the reason that it is hard to find Him. We do not want Him to give up His greatness: that would be to lose our God in the very act of finding Him. Do not be discouraged, then, as difficulties present themselves in Christian statement, or religious thought, or spiritual experience; do not say that such difficulties prove the falsity of the revelation. But see them all as only preserving that greatness and wonder and mystery of a God, who holds us and all the world in His keeping.

But if we may not ask, and do not want to ask, that all mystery should be removed, what may we look for? Surely for the removal of the sting of

that old difficulty of the hiding of God. The great revelation of Him must be able to put with that mystery, which it still preserves, all the things which have made men claim and hope that God was not a mystery. First, there is the feeling that God is in the world, and especially in men and in the life which men are leading. We hear that there is a God, and we want to know Him; and it is most natural to say, "I will find Him in this life of man, which is the highest and most spiritual thing that I know of in the world." One of the hardest features of that baffled experience, at which we have glanced, is the disappointment at feeling that God is not near to us, and that we must go into some strange region for Him. We have looked at the highest paths of life, and He was not there; and it is the drawing-back from that strange region, beyond and outside of all daily experience and knowledge, that makes men's aversion to religion.

Now go into the very centre of the revelation of God, close to its greatest mystery,—that of the Trinity,—and what is its first great positive truth? God was present in the world; He came into it, He lived in it; human life was His. It was because He loved man, respected his being, valued his life, that He came. That is the great truth of God the Son. It is from that truth that the for-

mulated doctrine of a Trinity starts. It contains, therefore, just what men are looking and asking for in all their search for God in those many paths of human life in which they are only able to come to the conclusion that He is a God that hideth Himself. Now we can use nature, can use human life, can use daily experience, as a means of getting to God, for we have the point of connection in that thought, that "the Father sent the Son;" and as we follow that Son's life hither and thither, over those same paths that we are following every day, bringing His experiences and ours together, we learn of God.

If men would only see that the doctrine of a Trinity has its first ground in the longing of God to get near to man, I think that it would not so often be pronounced hard, cold, and useless. We should all see how to use it. When life and the world seemed cruel and disappointing, seemed to be discouraging us from any attempt to find God, then we would turn to our doctrine of God, and, gathering re-assurance from the announcement that there is in the Godhead, not only the power of sitting afar off in mysterious grandeur, but also the power of coming near to each one of us, and being one with us, we should take up our life again with new courage, and go back to the world with new confidence, feeling sure that God is in it, and is

not beyond meeting us there. How many demands of a false naturalism, which says God is the power immanent in nature; of a pantheism, which, saying God is everywhere, makes every thing God, and loses all sight of a personal God; of worldliness, which, magnifying daily life and duty, grows into forgetfulness and carelessness of God, — how many of these have full room for true expansion and use in our idea of God! Just as a child may do with benefit and profit many things under his father's roof which are full of danger and temptation in other surroundings, so, holding to our faith in God, as He has showed Himself to us, we have an idea of God's eternal presence with His creature, man, and of the way in which God and man are bound together, which in any other connection would most dangerously diminish the distance between Him and us. In constant faith of such a great God, men have felt the presence of a Saviour supporting them, and a Spirit guiding them, and declared, "Though Thou art a God that hideth Thyself, Thou art my God and my Saviour."

Another characteristic of our search for God is, that we want Him to be like us in character and feeling. If He is not, we do not see how we can form any estimate of Him, and know Him at all. And yet that desire to have Him like us has led to such evil results, that men often distrust it. It

has so generally resulted in making a man's God only an unnaturally magnified reflection of his own character, that the pictures thus produced have been any thing but attractive. They have so often had cruelty, hatred, and narrowness in them, that men, rejecting such representations, have said, "We cannot know God, He is so different from us; He is a God that hideth Himself."

We turn again to that revealed picture of our God as it is given in the thought of a Trinity, and we find that it contains the very central idea of human life, — mutual feeling and relation. It is that mutual feeling which, under the influence of sin, leads to the contests and bitternesses of human action, which makes one man the enemy of another; but it is also that power of feeling toward each other, which binds us all together in the unity of friendship, family, and race. Division under unity is the great characteristic of all life; by that alone all the movement of life is sustained. God reveals Himself to us, and we see the same thing in Him when we hear of that division of persons in the one Godhead. It is full of the mystery which belongs to One infinitely above us. But it is the assurance that God is as we are, so that we can understand Him; it is the destruction of that tantalizing idea, that we know that there is a God, only to feel that there is nothing more

about Him that we can know. That is one of the bitterest ideas that ever possessed the mind of man. But our hearts burn with the best feelings of life, — love to those who are bound to us by ties which God's own hand has made, — and then we know that that feeling is worthy of immortal souls; that God can sympathize with it, for "the Father loveth the Son." We are impressed with ideas of morality, of duty toward our fellow-men; and we see that those thoughts, regulating all our relations, are guiding us to eternal life, and preparing us to live with God, for there is mutual action in that Godhead, as the Spirit takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us.

We know not the particulars of that relation; farther than that we cannot go. We use, because we have been told that we may do so, our relation of father and son as figures to express it; we blindly call the relation within the Godhead that of persons. But only to know that there is such a relation, and the possibility of it, that is the blessing. That gives us a true connection with our God; that makes us confident in going on, and making that connection a reality; that makes us look up to God for sympathy and guidance in our relations to each other; that assures us that we can be like God, not as Eve tried to be, when she first fell into sin, by searching out

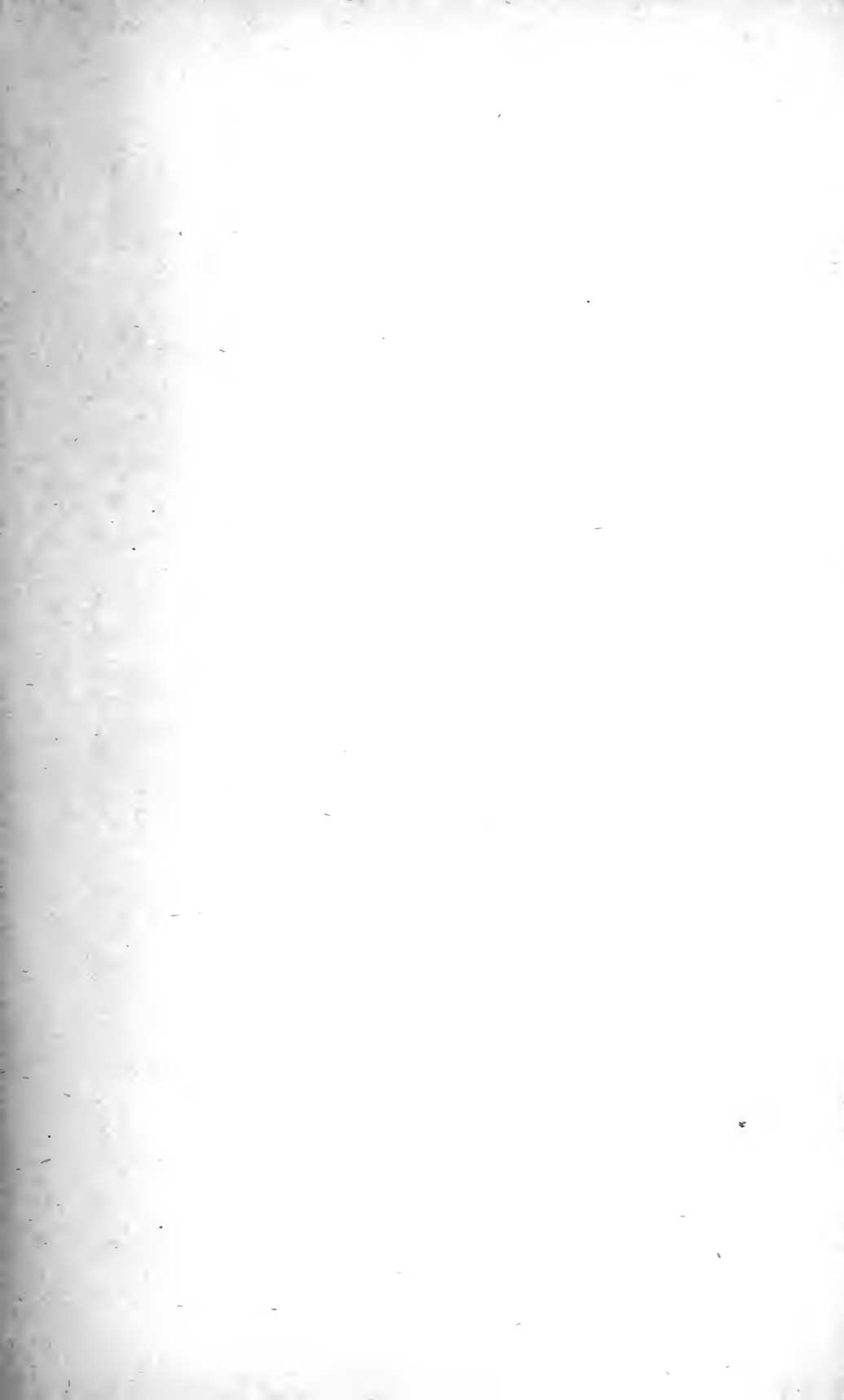
for herself the secrets of good and evil, but by relying upon that God who alone knows the true meaning of how to be good, and who can teach it to us. We are not to mystify ourselves by any numerical or mathematical conceptions of the Three in One, but we can see that it reveals a positive truth to us, without which God would not be ours; and then we can pray and look to that God with more courage and confidence to help us fulfil all the relations of life, and so be His children indeed.

One more difficulty in our search for God is in finding the marks of His personal presence as a ruler of minutest affairs. We lose Him just as we get nearest to individual action. It is easy to think of Him as a great world-power, but does He care for the falling sparrow? There other causes seem to rule. We think of His ruling the sun and moon and stars; but each one of us has to light his lamp in his own dwelling. Once more it is the bad and superstitious use of that idea of God's personal presence which has made men distrust it, and say, "God cannot be thought of thus." But yet we cannot spare that truly personal idea of God's individual interest in all persons and all events. We want to find something more than our own power in the nearest events of life, if we are to keep God at all.

And so we turn to our revealed doctrine again, and that careful designation of purposes re-assures us. Our God is one for creation, salvation, and guidance. He knows us and our needs; we can feel Him present on every occasion. Our life, individual and personal, in its wants and necessities, is met by His equally personal power and adaptation. We need not be afraid that He will fail us. We may not see how, at each point, the supply will come; but the great thought is clear, that our God is more than a world machine, whose work our individual hands must take up and finish off in nice detail, and for finer uses: He is a personal God, knowing us, and meeting us at every point; and our varied wants are covered by His greater wisdom. We see that, in all that is told us of what He is and what He has done. It is all of a nature to assure us that there is a power and presence of God in each smallest event.

Have we gained any conception of the Trinity as a revelation by thus noting these positive features of union with human nature, true mutual relation, and declaration of personal action which it contains? If so, we can rejoice in it, and it can help us. Life is hard enough, God knows. He would not bind a new theological burden, and lay it on our backs. Do not commit the violence of laying such a charge to the great loving One. Pil-

grim's burden fell off at the sight of the Cross; and so, at the true sight of God as Christ has showed Himself to us to-day, our burden of doubt is to fall off, as we know how near our God is to our life, our nature, and our wants. Take God by faith, not in a mysterious doctrine, but in the living Christ, and the revelation of God shall be seen to be full of light, breaking in on the clouds of earth and of sin, and helping us every day to know more of that God who, though He hideth Himself, is our Father, our Saviour, and our Guide.







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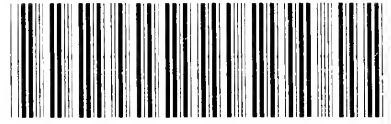
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